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MENS CONSCIA RECTI

Peter Rothwell.

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THE

CANTERBURY TALES

OF

CHAUCER.

IN FIVE VOLUMES.

THE

CANTERBURY TALES

OF

CHAUCER;

WITH AN ESSAY UPON HIS LANGUAGE AND VERSIFICATION,
AN INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE, NOTES,
AND A GLOSSARY,

BY T. TYRWHITT, ESQ.

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THE

CANTERBURY TALES.

THE MILLERES PROLOGUE.

WHAN that the Knight had thus his tale told, 3111
In all the compagnie n'as ther yong ne old,
That he ne said it was a noble storie,
And worthy to be drawen to memorie;
And namely the gentiles everich on.
Our Hoste lough and swore, So mote I gon,
This goth aright; unbokeled is the male;
Let see now who shal tel another tale:
For trewely this game is wel begonne.
Now telleth ye, sire Monk, if that ye conne, 3120
Somwhat, to quiten with the knightes tale.
The Miller that for-dronken was all pale,
So that unnethes upon his hors he sat,
He n'old avalen neither hood ne hat,
Ne abiden no man for his curtesie,
But in Pilates vois he gan to crie,
And swore by armes, and by blood, and bones,
I can a noble tale for the nones,
With which I wol now quite the knightes tale. 3129

Our Hoste saw that he was dronken of ale, 3130
And sayd; abide, Robin, my leve brother,
Som better man shall tell us first another:
Abide, and let us werken thriftily.
By Goddes soule (quod he) that wol not I,
For I wol speke, or elles go my way.
Our Hoste answerd; Tell on a devil way;
Thou art a fool; thy wit is overcome.
Now herkeneth, quod the Miller, all and some:
But first I make a protestatioun, 3139
That I am dronke, I know it by my soun:
And therefore if that I misspeke or say,
Wite it the ale of Southwerk, I you pray:
For I wol tell a legend and a lif
Both of a carpenter and of his wif,
How that a clerk hath set the wrightes cappe.
The Reve answerd and saide, Stint thy clappe.
Let be thy lewed dronken harlotrie. 3147
It is a sinne, and eke a gret folie
To apeiren any man, or him defame,
And eke to bringen wives in swiche a name.
Thou mayst ynough of other thinges sain.
This dronken Miller spake ful sone again,
And sayde; Leve brother Osewold,
Who hath no wif, he is no cokewold.
But I say not therfore that thou art on; 3155

Ther ben ful goode wives many on. 3156
Why art thou angry with my tale now?
I have a wif parde as wel as thou,
Yet n'olde I, for the oxen in my plough,
Taken upon me more than ynough
As demen of myself that I am on;
I wol beleven wel that I am non.
An Husbond shuld not ben inquisitif
Of Goddes privite, ne of his wif. 3164
So he may finden Goddes foison there,
Of the remenant nedeth not to enquere.

What shuld I more say, but this Millere
He n'olde his wordes for no man forbere,
But told his cherles tale in his manere,
Me thinketh, that I shal reherse it here.
And therefore every gentil wight I pray,
For Goddes love as deme not that I say 3172
Of evil entent, but that I mote reherse
Hir tales alle, al be they better or werse,
Or elles falsen som of my matere.
And therfore who so list it not to here,
Turne over the leef, and chese another tale,
For he shal find ynow bothe gret and smale,
Of storial thing that toucheth gentillesse,
And eke moralite, and holinesse. 3180

Blameth not me, if that ye chese amis. 3181
The Miller is a cherl, ye know wel this,
So was the Reve, (and many other mo)
And harlotrie they tolden bothe two.
Aviseth you now, and put me out of blame;
And eke men shuld not make ernest of game.

THE MILLERES TALE.

Whilom ther was dwelling in Oxenforde 3187
A riche gnof, that gestes helde to borde,
And of his craft he was a carpenter.
With him ther was dwelling a poure scoler,
Had lerned art, but all his fantasie
Was turned for to lerne astrologie,
And coude a certain of conclusions
To demen by interrogations,
If that men asked him in certain houres, 3195
Whan that men shulde have drought or elles shoures:
Or if men asked him what shulde falle
Of every thing, I may not reken alle.
This clerk was cleped hendy Nicholas;
Of derne love he coude and of solas;
And therto he was slie and ful prive,
And like a maiden meke for to se.
A chambre had he in that hostelrie 3203

Alone, withouten any compagnie, 3204
Ful fetisly ydight with herbes sote,
And he himself was swete as is the rote
Of licoris, or any setewale.
His almageste, and bokes gret and smale,
His astrelabre, longing for his art,
His augrim stones, layen faire apart
On shelves couched at his beddes hed,
His presse ycovered with a falding red. 3212
And all above ther lay a gay sautrie,
On which he made on nightes melodie,
So swetely, that all the chambre rong:
And *Angelus ad virginem* he song.
And after that he song the kinges note;
Ful often blessed was his mery throte.
And thus this swete clerk his time spent
After his frendes finding and his rent. 3220
  This carpenter had wedded new a wif,
Which that he loved more than his lif:
Of eightene yere she was I gesse of age.
Jalous he was, and held hire narwe in cage,
For she was wild and yonge, and he was old,
And demed himself belike a cokewold.
He knew not Caton, for his wit was rude,
That bade a man shulde wedde his similitude.
Men shulden wedden after hir estate, 3229

For youthe and elde is often at debate. 3230
But sithen he was fallen in the snare,
He most endure (as other folk) his care.
Fayre was this yonge wif, and therwithal
As any wesel hire body gent and smal.
A seint she wered, barred all of silk,
A barme-cloth eke as white as morwe milk
Upon hire lendes, ful of many a gore.
White was hire smok, and brouded all before 3238
And eke behind on hire colere aboute
Of cole-black silk, within and eke withoute.
The tapes of hire white volupere
Were of the same suit of hire colere;
Hire fillet brode of silk, and set full hye:
And sikerly she had a likerous eye.
Ful smal ypulled were hire browes two,
And they were bent, and black as any slo. 3246
She was wel more blisful for to see
Than is the newe perienete tree;
And softer than the wolle is of a wether.
And by hire girdel heng a purse of lether,
Tasseled with silk, and perled with latoun.
In all this world to seken up and doun
Ther n'is no man so wise, that coude thenche
So gay a popelot, or swiche a wenche.
Ful brighter was the shining of hire hewe, 3255

Than in the tour the noble yforged newe. 3256
But of hire song, it was as loud and yerne,
As any swalow sitting on a berne.
Therto she coude skip, and make a game,
As any kid or calf folowing his dame.
Hire mouth was swete as braket or the meth,
Or hord of apples, laid in hay or heth.
Winsing she was, as is a joly colt,
Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt. 3266
A broche she bare upon hire low colere,
As brode as is the bosse of a bokelere.
Hire shoon were laced on hire legges hie;
She was a primerole, a piggesnie,
For any lord to liggen in his bedde,
Or yet for any good yemen to wedde.
  Now sire, and eft sire, so befell the cas,
That on a day this hendy Nicholas 3272
Fel with this yonge wif to rage and pleye,
While that hire husbond was at Oseney,
As clerkes ben ful subtil and ful queint.
And prively he caught hire by the queint,
And sayde; Ywis, but if I have my will,
For derne love of thee, lemman, I spill.
And helde hire faste by the hanche bones,
And sayde; Lemman, love me wel at ones,
Or I wol dien, al so God me save. 3281

And she sprong as a colt doth in the trave: 3282
And with hire hed she writhed faste away,
And sayde; I wol not kisse thee by my fay.
Why let be, (quod she) let be, Nicholas,
Or I wol crie out harow and alas.
Do way your hondes for your curtesie.
This Nicholas gan mercy for to crie,
And spake so faire, and profered him so fast,
That she hire love him granted at the last, 3290
And swore hire oth by Seint Thomas of Kent,
That she wold ben at his commandement,
Whan that she may hire leiser wel espie.
Myn husbond is so ful of jalousie,
That but ye waiten wel, and be prive,
I wot right wel I n'am but ded, quod she.
Ye mosten be ful derne as in this cas.
Nay, therof care you not, quod Nicholas: 3298
A clerk had litherly beset his while,
But if he coude a carpenter begile.
And thus they were accorded and ysworne
To waite a time, as I have said beforne.
Whan Nicholas had don thus every del,
And thacked hire about the lendes wel,
He kissed hire swete, and taketh his sautrie,
And plaieth fast, and maketh melodie.
Than fell it thus, that to the parish cherche 3307

(Of Cristes owen werkes for to werche) 3308
This good wif went upon a holy day:
Hire forehed shone as bright as any day,
So was it washen, whan she lete hire werk.
  Now was ther of that chirche a parish clerk,
The which that was ycleped Absolon.
Crulle was his here, and as the gold it shon,
And strouted as a fanne large and brode;
Ful streight and even lay his joly shode. 3316
His rode was red, his eyen grey as goos,
With Poules windowes corven on his shoos.
In hosen red he went ful fetisly.
Yclad he was ful smal and proprely,
All in in a kirtel of a light waget;
Ful faire and thicke ben the pointes set.
And therupon he had a gay surplise,
As white as is the blosme upon the rise. 3324
  A mery child he was, so God me save;
Wel coud he leten blod, and clippe, and shave,
And make a chartre of lond, and a quitance.
In twenty manere coud he trip and dance,
(After the scole of Oxenforde tho)
And with his legges casten to and fro;
And playen songes on a smal ribible;
Therto he song somtime a loud quinible.
And as wel coud he play on a giterne. 3333

In all the toun n'as brewhous ne taverne,
That he ne visited with his solas,
Ther as that any gaillard tapstere was.
But soth to say he was somdel squaimous
Of farting, and of speche dangerous.
 This Absolon, that joly was and gay,
Goth with a censer on the holy day,
Censing the wives of the parish faste;
And many a lovely loke he on hem caste,
And namely on this carpenteres wif:
To loke on hire him thought a mery lif.
She was so propre, and swete, and likerous.
I dare well sain, if she had been a mous,
And he a cat, he wolde hire hente anon.
 This parish clerk. this joly Absolon,
Hath in his herte swiche a love longing,
That of no wif toke he non offering;
For curtesie, he sayd, he n'olde non.
 The moone at night ful clere and brighte shon,
And Absolon his giterne hath ytake,
For paramours he thoughte for to wake.
And forth he goth, jolif and amorous,
Til he came to the carpenteres hous,
A litel after the cockes had ycrow,
And dressed him up by a shot window,
That was upon the carpenteres wal.

He singeth in his vois gentil and smal; 3360
Now, dere lady,—if thy wille be,
I pray you that ye—wol rewe on me;
Ful wel accordant to his giterning.
This carpenter awoke, and herd him sing,
And spake unto his wif, and said anon,
What, Alison, heres thou not Absolon,
That chanteth thus under our boures wal?
And she answerd hire husbond therwithal; 3368
Yes, God wot, John, I here him every del.
This passeth forth; what wol ye bet than wel?
Fro day to day this joly Absolon
So loveth hire, that him is wo-begon.
He waketh all the night, and all the day,
He kembeth his lockes brode, and made him gay.
He woeth hire by menes and brocage,
And swore he wolde ben hire owen page. 3376
He singeth brokking as a nightingale.
He sent hire pinnes, methe, and spiced ale,
And wafres piping hot out of the glede:
And for she was of toun, he profered mede.
For som folk wol be wonnen for richesse,
And some for strokes, and some with gentillesse.
Sometime to shew his lightnesse and maistrie
He plaieth Herode on a skaffold hie.
But what availeth him as in this cas? 3385

So loveth she this hendy Nicholas, 3386
That Absolon may blow the buckes horne:
He ne had for his labour but a scorne.
And thus she maketh Absolon hire ape,
And all his ernest tourneth to a jape.
Ful soth is this proverbe, it is no lie;
Men say right thus alway; the neighe slie
Maketh oft time the fer leef to be lothe.
For though that Absolon be wood or wrothe, 3394
Because that he fer was from hire sight,
This neighe Nicholas stood in his light.
  Now bere thee wel, thou hendy Nicholas,
For Absolon may waile and sing alas.
  And so befell that on a Saturday,
This carpenter was gon to Osenay,
And hendy Nicholas and Alison
Accorded ben to this conclusion, 3402
That Nicholas shal shapen him a wile
This sely jalous husbond to begile;
And if so were the game went aright,
She shuld slepe in his armes alle night,
For this was hire desire and his also.
And right anon, withouten wordes mo,
This Nicholas no lenger wolde tarie,
But doth ful soft unto his chambre carie
Both mete and drinke for a day or twey. 3411

And to hire husbond bad hire for to sey, 3412
If that he axed after Nicholas,
She shulde say, she n'iste not wher he was;
Of all the day she saw him not with eye.
She trowed he was in som maladie,
For for no crie hire maiden coud him calle
He n'olde answer, for nothing that might falle.
Thus passeth forth all thilke Saturday,
That Nicholas still in his chambre lay, 3420
And ete, and slept, and dide what him list
Til Sonday, that the sonne goth to rest.
This sely carpenter hath gret mervaile
Of Nicholas, or what thing might him aile,
And said; I am adrad by Seint Thomas
It stondeth not aright with Nicholas:
God shilde that he died sodenly.
This world is now ful tikel sikerly. 3428
I saw to-day a corps yborne to cherche,
That now on Monday last I saw him werche.
Go up (quod he unto his knave) anon;
Clepe at his dore, or knocke with a ston:
Loke how it is, and tell me boldely.
This knave goth him up ful sturdely,
And at the chambre dore while that he stood,
He cried and knocked as that he were wood:
What how? what do ye, maister Nicholay? 3437

How may ye slepen all the longe day? 3438
But all for nought, he herde not a word.
An hole he fond ful low upon the bord,
Ther as the cat was wont in for to crepe,
And at that hole he loked in ful depe,
And at the last he had of him a sight.
  This Nicholas sat ever gaping upright,
As he had kyked on the newe mone.
  Adoun he goth, and telleth his maister sone, 3446
In what array he saw this ilke man.
  This carpenter to blissen him began,
And said; Now helpe us Seinte Frideswide.
A man wote litel what shal him betide.
This man is fallen with his astronomie
In some woodnesse or in som agonie.
I thought ay wel how that it shulde be.
Men shulde not knowe of Goddes privetee. 3454
Ya blessed be alway a lewed man,
That nought but only his beleve can.
So ferd another clerk with astronomie;
He walked in the feldes for to prie
Upon the sterres, what ther shuld befalle,
Til he was in a marlepit yfalle.
He saw not that. but yet by Seint Thomas
Me reweth sore of hendy Nicholas:
He shal be rated of his studying, 3463

If that I may, by Jesus heven king.
  Get me a staf, that I may underspore
While that thou, Robin, hevest of the dore:
He shal out of his studying, as I gesse.
And to the chambre dore he gan him dresse.
His knave was a strong carl for the nones,
And by the haspe he haf it of at ones;
Into the flore the dore fell anon.
  This Nicholas sat ay as stille as ston,
And ever he gaped upward into the eire.
  This carpenter wend he were in despeire,
And hent him by the shulders mightily,
And shoke him hard, and cried spitously;
What, Nicholas? what how man? loke adoun:
Awake, and thinke on Cristes passioun.
I crouche thee from elves, and from wightes.
Therwith the nightspel said he anon rightes,
On foure halves of the hous aboute,
And on the threswold of the dore withoute.
Jesu Crist, and Seint Benedight.
Blisse this hous from every wicked wight,
Fro the nightes mare, the wite Pater-noster;
Wher wonest thou Seint Peters suster?
  And at the last this hendy Nicholas
Gan for to siken sore, and said; Alas!
Shal all the world be lost eftsones now?

This carpenter answered; What saiest thou? 3490
What? thinke on God, as we do, men that swinke.
This Nicholas answered; Fetch me a drinke;
And after wol I speke in privetee
Of certain thing that toucheth thee and me:
I wol tell it non other man certain.
This carpenter goth doun, and cometh again,
And brought of mighty ale a large quart; 3497
And whan that eche of hem had dronken his part,
This Nicholas his dore faste shette,
And doun the carpenter by him he sette,
And saide; John, min hoste lefe and dere,
Thou shalt upon thy trouthe swere me here,
That to no wight thou shalt my conseil wrey:
For it is Cristes conseil that I say,
And if thou tell it man, thou art forlore:
For this vengeance thou shalt have therfore, 3506
That if thou wreye me, thou shalt be wood.
Nay, Crist forbede it for his holy blood,
Quod tho this sely man; I am no labbe,
Ne though I say it, I n'am not lefe to gabbe.
Say what thou wolt, I shal it never telle
To child ne wif, by him that harwed helle.
Now, John, (quod Nicholas) I wol not lie,
I have yfounde in min astrologie,
As I have loked in the moone bright, 3515

That now on Monday next, at quarter night, 3516
Shal fall a rain, and that so wild and wood
That half so gret was never Noes flood.
This world (he said) in lesse than in an houre
Shal all be dreint, so hidous is the shoure:
Thus shal mankinde drenche, and lese hir lif.
  This carpenter answerd; Alas my wif!
And shal she drenche? alas min Alisoun!
For sorwe of this he fell almost adoun, 3524
And said; Is ther no remedy in this cas?
  Why yes, for God, quod hendy Nicholas;
If thou wolt werken after lore and rede;
Thou maist not werken after thin owen hede.
For thus saith Salomon, that was ful trewe;
Werke all by conseil, and thou shalt not rewe.
And if thou werken wolt by good conseil,
I undertake, withouten mast or seyl, 3532
Yet shal I saven hire, and thee and me.
Hast thou not herd how saved was Noe,
Whan that our Lord had warned him beforne,
That al the world with water shuld be lorne?
  Yes, (quod this carpenter) ful yore ago.
  Hast thou not herd (quod Nicholas) also
The sorwe of Noe with his felawship,
Or that he mighte get his wif to ship?
Him had be lever, I dare wel undertake, 3541

At thilke time, than all his wethers blake, 3542
That she had had a ship hire self alone.
And therfore wost thou what is best to done?
This axeth hast, and of an hastif thing
Men may not preche and maken tarying.
Anon go get us fast into this in
A kneding trough or elles a kemelyn,
For eche of us; but loke that they ben large,
In which we mowen swimme as in a barge: 3550
And have therin vitaille suffisant
But for a day; fie on the remenant;
The water shall aslake and gon away
Abouten prime upon the nexte day.
But Robin may not wete of this, thy knave,
Ne eke thy mayden Gille I may not save:
Axe not why: for though thou axe me,
I wol not tellen Goddes privetee. 3558
Sufficeth thee, but if thy wittes madde,
To have as gret a grace as Noe hadde.
Thy wif shall I wel saven out of doute.
Go now thy way, and spede thee hereaboute.
  But whan thou hast for hire, and thee, and me,
Ygeten us these kneding tubbes thre,
Than shalt thou hang hem in the roofe ful hie,
That no man of our purveyance espie:
And whan thou hast don thus as I have said, 3567

And hast our vitaille faire in hem ylaid,
And eke an axe to smite the cord a-two
Whan that the water cometh, that we may go,
And breke an hole on high upon the gable
Unto the gardin ward, over the stable,
That we may frely passen forth our way,
Whan that the grete shoure is gon away.
Than shal thou swim as mery, I undertake,
As doth the white doke after hire drake:
Than wol I clepe, How Alison, how John,
Be mery: for the flood wol passe anon.
And thou wolt sain, Haile maister Nicholay,
Good morwe, I see thee wel, for it is day.
And than shall we be lordes all our lif
Of all the world, as Noe and his wif.
But of o thing I warne thee ful right,
Be wel avised on that ilke night,
That we ben entred into shippes bord,
That non of us ne speke not o word,
Ne clepe ne crie, but be in his praiere,
For it is Goddes owen heste dere.
 Thy wif and thou moste hangen fer a-twinne,
For that betwixen you shal be no sinne,
No more in loking than ther shal in dede.
This ordinance is said; go, God thee spede.
To morwe at night, whan men ben all aslepe,

Into our kneding tubbes wol we crepe, 3594
And sitten ther, abiding Goddes grace.
Go now thy way, I have no lenger space,
To make of this no lenger sermoning:
Men sain thus: send the wise, and say nothing:
Thou art so wise, it nedeth thee nought teche.
Go, save our lives, and that I thee beseche.
  This sely carpenter goth forth his way,
Ful oft he said alas, and wala wa, 3602
And to his wif he told his privetee,
And she was ware, and knew it bet than he
What all this queinte cast was for to sey.
But natheles she ferde as she wold dey,
And said; Alas! go forth thy way anon.
Helpe us to scape, or we be ded eche on.
I am thy trewe veray wedded wif;
Go, dere spouse, and helpe to save our lif. 3610
  Lo, what a gret thing is affection,
Men may die of imagination,
So depe may impression be take.
This sely carpenter beginneth quake:
Him thinketh veraily that he may see
Noes flood comen walwing as the see
To drenchen Alison, his hony dere.
He wepeth, waileth, maketh sory chere;
He siketh, with ful many a sory swough. 3619

He goth, and geteth him a kneding trough,
And after a tubbe, and a kemelin,
And prively he sent hem to his in :
And heng hem in the roof in privetee.
His owen hond than made he ladders three,
To climben by the renges and the stalkes
Unto the tubbes honging in the balkes;
And hem vitailled, kemelin, trough and tubbe,
With bred and chese and good ale in a jubbe,
Sufficing right ynow as for a day.
  But er that he had made all this array,
He sent his knave, and eke his wenche also
Upon his nede to London for to go.
And on the Monday, whan it drew to night,
He shette his dore, withouten candel light,
And dressed all thing as it shulde bee.
And shortly up they clomben alle three.
They sitten stille wel a furlong way.
Now, *Pater noster,* clum, said Nicholay,
And clum, quod John, and clum, said Alison :
This carpenter said his devotion,
And still he sit, and biddeth his praiere,
Awaiting on the rain, if he it here.
  The dede slepe, for wery besinesse,
Fell on this carpenter, right as I gesse,
Abouten curfew time, or litel more.

For travaille of his gost he groneth sore, 3646
And eft he routeth, for his hed mislay.
Doun of the ladder stalketh Nicholay,
And Alison ful soft adoun hire spedde.
Withouten wordes mo they went to bedde,
Ther as the carpenter was wont to lie;
Ther was the revel, and the melodie.
And thus lith Alison, and Nicholas,
In besinesse of mirthe and in solas, 3654
Til that the bell of *laudes* gan to ring,
And freres in the chancel gon to sing.
  This parish clerk, this amorous Absolon,
That is for love alway so wo-begon,
Upon the Monday was at Osenay
With compagnie, him to disport and play;
And asked upon cas a cloisterer
Ful prively after John the carpenter; 3662
And he drew him apart out of the chirche.
He said, I n'ot; I saw him not here wirche
Sith Saturday; I trow that he be went
For timbre, ther our abbot hath him sent.
For he is wont for timhre for to go,
And dwellen at the Grange a day or two:
Or elles he is at his hous certain.
Wher that he be, I cannot sothly sain.
  This Absolon ful joly was and light, 3671

And thoughte, now is time to wake al night, 3672
For sikerly, I saw him nat stiring
About his dore, sin day began to spring.
So mote I thrive, I shal at cockes crow
Ful priv깅ly go knocke at his window,
That stant ful low upon his boures wall:
To Alison wol I now tellen all
My love longing; for yet I shal not misse,
That at the leste way I shal hire kisse. 3680
Some maner comfort shal I have parfay,
My mouth hath itched all this longe day:
That is a signe of kissing at the leste.
All night me mette eke, I was at a feste.
Therfore I wol go slepe an houre or twey,
And all the night than wol I wake and pley.
  Whan that the firste cock hath crowe anon
Up rist this joly lover Absolon, 3688
And him arayeth gay, at point devise.
But first he cheweth grein and licorise,
To smellen sote, or he had spoke with here.
Under his tonge a trewe love he bere,
For therby wend he to ben gracious.
He cometh to the carpenteres hous,
And still he stant under the shot window;
Unto his brest it raught, it was so low;
And soft he cougheth with a semisoun. 3697

What do ye honycombe, swete Alisoun? 3698
My faire bird, my swete sinamome,
Awaketh, lemman min, and speketh to me.
Ful litel thinken ye upon my wo,
That for your love I swete ther as I go.
No wonder is though that I swelte and swete.
I mourne as doth a lamb after the tete.
Ywis, lemman, I have swiche love longing,
That like a turtel trewe is my mourning. 3706
I may not ete no more than a maid.
Go fro the window, jacke fool, she said:
As helpe me God, it wol not be, compame.
I love another, or elles I were to blame,
Wel bet than thee by Jesu, Absolon.
Go forth thy way, or I wol cast a ston;
And let me slepe; a twenty divel way.
Alas! (quod Absolon) and wala wa! 3714
That trewe love was ever so yvel besette:
Than kisse me, sin that it may be no bette,
For Jesus love, and for the love of me.
Wilt thou than go thy way therwith? quod she.
Ya certes, lemman, quod this Absolon.
Than make thee redy, (quod she) I come anon,
This Absolon doun set him on his knees,
And saide; I am a lord at all degrees:
For after this I hope ther cometh more; 3723

Lemman, thy grace, and, swete bird, thyn ore. 3724
The window she undoth, and that in haste.
Have don, (quod she) come of, and spede thee faste,
Lest that our neigheboures thee espie.
This Absolon gan wipe his mouth full drie.
Derke was the night, as pitch or as the cole,
And at the window she put out hire hole,
And Absolon him felle ne bet ne wers,
But with his mouth he kist hire naked ers 3732
Ful savorly, er he was ware of this.
Abak he sterte, and thought it was amis,
For wel he wist a woman hath no berd.
He felt a thing all rowe, and long yherd,
And saide; fy, alas! what have I do?
Te he, quod she, and clapt the window to;
And Absolon goth forth a sory pas.
A berd, a berd, said hendy Nicholas; 3740
By goddes *corpus*, this goth faire and wel.
This sely Absolon herd every del,
And on his lippe he gan for anger bite;
And to himself he said, I shal thee quite.
Who rubbeth now, who froteth now his lippes
With dust, with sond, with straw, with cloth, with chippes,
But Absolon? that saith full oft, alas!
My soule betake I unto Sathanas,
But me were lever than all this toun (quod he) 3749

Of this despit awroken for to be.
Alas! alas! that I ne had yblent.
His hote love is cold, and all yqueint.
For fro that time that he had kist hire ers,
Of paramours ne raught he not a kers,
For he was heled of his maladie;
Ful often paramours he gan defie,
And wepe as doth a child that is ybete.
A softe pas he went him over the strete
Until a smith, men callen dan Gerveis,
That in his forge smithed plow-harneis;
He sharpeth share and cultre besily.
This Absolon knocketh all esily,
And said; Undo, Gerveis, and that anon.
  What, who art thou? It am I Absolon.
What? Absolon, what? Cristes swete tre,
Why rise ye so rath? ey *benedicite*,
What eileth you? some gay girle, God it wote,
Hath brought you thus upon the viretote:
By Seint Neote, ye wote wel what I mene.
  This Absolon ne raughte not a bene
Of all his play, no word again he yaf.
He hadde more tawe on his distaf
Than Gerveis knew, and saide; Frend so dere,
That hote culter in the cheminee here
As lene it me, I have therwith to don:

I wol it bring again to thee ful sone. 3776
  Gerveis answered; Certes, were it gold,
Or in a poke nobles all untold,
Thou shuldest it have, as I am trewe smith.
Ey, Cristes foot, what wol ye don therwith?
Therof, quod Absolon, be as be may;
I shal wel tellen thee another day:
And caught the culter by the colde stele.
Ful soft out at the dore he gan to stele, 3784
And went unto the carpenteres wall.
He coughed first, and knocked therwithall
Upon the window, right as he did er.
  This Alison answered; Who is ther
That knocketh so? I warrant him a thefe.
  Nay, nay, (quod he) God wot, my swete lefe,
I am thin Absolon, thy dereling.
Of gold (quod he) I have thee brought a ring, 3792
My mother yave it me, so God me save,
Ful fine it is, and therto wel ygrave:
This wol I yeven thee, if thou me kisse.
  This Nicholas was risen for to pisse,
And thought he wolde amenden all the jape,
He shulde kisse his ers er that he scape:
And up the window did he hastily,
And out his ers he putteth prively
Over the buttok, to the hanche bon. 3801

And therwith spake this clerk, this Absolon, 3802
Speke swete bird, I n'ot not wher thou art.
This Nicholas anon let fleen a fart,
As gret as it had ben a thonder dint,
That with the stroke he was wel nie yblint:
And he was redy with his yren hote,
And Nicholas amid the ers he smote.
Off goth the skinne an hondbrede al aboute.
The hote culter brenned so his toute, 3810
That for the smert he wened for to die;
As he were wood, for wo he gan to crie,
Help, water, water, help for Goddes herte.
This carpenter out of his slomber sterte,
And herd on crie water, as he were wood,
And thought, alas, now cometh Noes flood.
He set him up withouten wordes mo,
And with his axe he smote the cord atwo; 3818
And doun goth all; he fond neyther to selle
Ne breed ne ale, til he came to the selle,
Upon the flore, and ther aswoune he lay.
Up sterten Alison and Nicholay,
And crieden, out and harow! in the strete.
The neigheboures bothe smale and grete
In rannen, for to gauren on this man,
That yet aswoune lay, bothe pale and wan:
For with the fall he brosten hath his arm. 3827

But stonden he must unto his owen harm,
For whan he spake, he was anon bore doun
With hendy Nicholas and Alisoun.
They tolden every man that he was wood;
He was agaste so of Noes flood
Thurgh fantasie, that of his vanitee
He had ybought him kneding tubbes three,
And had hem honged in the roof above;
And that he praied hem for Goddes love
To sitten in the roof *par compagnie.*
The folk gan laughen at his fantasie.
Into the roof they kyken, and they gape,
And turned all his harm into a jape.
For what so that this carpenter answerd,
It was for nought, no man his reson herd.
With othes gret, he was so sworne adoun,
That he was holden wood in all the toun.
For everich clerk anon right held with other;
They said, the man was wood, my leve brother;
And every wight gan laughen at this strif.
Thus swived was the carpenteres wif,
For all his keping, and his jalousie;
And Absolon hath kist hire nether eye;
And Nicholas is scalded in the toute.
This tale is don, and God save all the route.

THE REVES PROLOGUE.

Whan folk han laughed at this nice cas 3853
Of Absolon and hendy Nicholas,
Diverse folk diversely they saide,
But for the more part they lought and plaide;
Ne at this tale I saw no man him greve,
But it were only Osewold the Reve.
Because he was of carpenteres craft,
A litel ire is in his herte ylaft; 3860
He gan to grutch and blamen it a lite.
So the ik, quod he, ful wel coude I him quite
With blering of a proude milleres eye,
If that me list to speke of ribaudrie.
But ik am olde; me list not play for age;
Gras time is don, my foddre is now forage.
This white top writeth min olde yeres;
Min herte is also mouled as min heres; 3868
But if I fare as doth an open ers;
That ilke fruit is ever lenger the wers,
Til it be roten in mullok, or in stre.
We olde men, I drede, so faren we,
Til we be roten can we not be ripe;
We hoppe alway, while that the world wol pipe;
For in our will ther stiketh ever a nayl,
To have an hore hed and a grene tayl, 3876

As hath a leke; for though our might be gon,
Our will desireth folly ever in on:
For whan we may not don, than wol we speken,
Yet in our ashen cold is fire yreken.
  Foure gledes han we, which I shal devise,
Avaunting, lying, anger, and covetise.
These foure sparkes longen unto elde.
Our olde limes mow wel ben unwelde,
But will ne shal not faillen, that is sothe.
And yet have I alway a coltes tothe,
As many a yere as it is passed henne,
Sin that my tappe of lif began to renne.
For sikerly, whan I was borne, anon
Deth drow the tappe of lif, and let it gon:
And ever sith hath so the tappe yronne,
Til that almost all empty is the tonne.
The streme of lif now droppeth on the chimbe.
The sely tonge may wel ringe and chimbe
Of wretchednesse, that passed is ful yore:
With olde folk, save dotage, is no more.
  Whan that our Hoste had herd this sermoning,
He gan to speke as lordly as a king,
And sayde; What amounteth all this wit?
What? shall we speke all day of holy writ?
The divel made a Reve for to preche,
Or of a souter a shipman, or a leche.

Say forth thy tale, and tary not the time:
Lo Depeford, and it is half way prime:
Lo Grenewich, ther many a shrew is inne.
It were al time thy tale to beginne.
Now, sires, quod this Osewold the Reve,
I pray you alle, that ye not you greve,
Though I answere, and somdel set his howve,
For leful is with force force off to showve.
This dronken Miller hath ytold us here,
How that begiled was a carpentere,
Paraventure in scorne, for I am on:
And by your leve, I shal him quite anon.
Right in his cherles termes wol I speke.
I pray to God his necke mote to-breke.
He can wel in min eye seen a stalk,
But in his owen he cannot seen a balk.

THE REVES TALE.

AT Trompington, not fer fro Cantebrigge,
Ther goth a brook, and over that a brigge,
Upon the whiche brook ther stont a melle:
And this is veray sothe, that I you telle.
A miller was ther dwelling many a day,
As any peacok he was proude and gay:
Pipen he coude, and fishe, and nettes bete,

And turnen cuppes, and wrastlen wel, and shete. 3926
Ay by his belt he bare a long pavade,
And of a swerd ful trenchant was the blade.
A joly popper bare he in his pouche;
Ther n'as no man for peril dorst him touche.
A Shefeld thwitel bare he in his hose.
Round was his face, and camuse was his nose.
As pilled as an ape was his skull.
He was a market-beter at the full. 3934
Ther dorste no wight hond upon him legge,
That he ne swore he shuld anon abegge.
  A thefe he was forsoth, of corn and mele,
And that a slie, and usant for to stele.
His name was hoten deinous Simekin.
A wif he hadde, comen of noble kin:
The person of the toun hire father was.
With hire he yaf ful many a panne of bras, 3942
For that Simkin shuld in his blood allie.
She yas yfostered in a nonnerie:
For Simkin wolde no wif, as he sayde,
But she were wel ynourished, and a mayde,
To saven his estat of yemanrie:
And she was proud, and pert as is a pie.
A ful faire sight was it upon hem two.
On holy dayes beforne hire wold he go
With his tipet ybounde about his hed; 3951

And she came after in a gite of red, 3952
And Simkin hadde hosen of the same.
Ther dorste no wight clepen hire but dame:
Was non so hardy, that went by the way,
That with hire dorste rage or ones play,
But if he wold be slain of Simekin
With pavade, or with knif, or bodekin.
(For jalous folk ben perilous evermo:
Algate they wold hir wives wenden so.) 3960
And eke for she was somdel smoterlich,
She was as digne as water in a dich,
And al so ful of hoker, and of bismare.
Hire thoughte that a ladie shuld hire spare,
What for hire kinrede, and hire nortelrie,
That she had lerned in the nonnerie.
  A doughter hadden they betwix hem two
Of twenty yere, withouten any mo, 3968
Saving a child that was of half yere age,
In cradle it lay, and was a propre page.
This wench thicke and wel ygrowen was,
With camuse nose, and eyen grey as glas;
With buttokes brode, and brestes round and hie;
But right faire was hire here, I wol nat lie.
  The person of the toun, for she was faire,
In purpos was to maken hire his haire
Both of his catel, and of his mesuage, 3977

And strange he made it of hire mariage. 3978
His purpos was for to bestowe hire hie
Into som worthy blood of ancestrie.
For holy chirches good mote ben despended
On holy chirches blood that is descended.
Therfore he wolde his holy blood honoure,
Though that he holy chirche shuld devoure.
Gret soken hath this miller out of doute
With whete and malt, of all the land aboute ; 3986
And namely ther was a gret college
Men clepe the Soler hall at Cantebrege,
Ther was hir whete and eke hir malt yground.
And on a day it happed in a stound,
Sike lay the manciple on a maladie,
Men wenden wisly that he shulde die.
For which this miller stale both mele and corn
An hundred times more than beforn. 3994
For therbeforn he stale but curteisly,
But now he was a thefe outrageously.
For which the wardein chidde and made fare,
But therof set the miller not a tare ;
He craked bost, and swore it n'as not so.
Than were ther yonge poure scoleres two,
That dwelten in the halle of which I say ;
Testif they were, and lusty for to play ;
And only for hir mirth and revelrie 4003

Upon the wardein besily they crie, 4004
To yeve hem leve but a litel stound,
To gon to mille, and seen hir corn yground :
And hardily they dorsten lay hir necke,
The miller shuld not stele hem half a pecke
Of corn by sleighte, ne by force hem reve.
  And at the last the wardein yave hem leve;
John highte that on, and Alein highte that other,
Of o toun were they born, that highte Strother, 4012
Fer in the North, I can not tellen where.
  This Alein maketh redy all his gere,
And on a hors the sak he cast anon :
Forth goth Alein the clerk, and also John,
With good swerd and with bokeler by hir side.
John knew the way, him neded not no guide,
And at the mille the sak adoun he laith.
  Alein spake first; All haile, Simond, in faith, 4020
How fares thy faire doughter, and thy wif?
  Alein, welcome (quod Simkin) by my lif,
And John also : how now, what do ye here ?
By God, Simond, (quod John) nede has no pee.
Him behoves serve himself that has na swain,
Or elles he is a fool, as clerkes sain.
Our manciple I hope he wol be ded,
Swa werkes ay the wanges in his hed :
And therfore is I come, and eke Alein, 4029

To grind our corn and cary it hame agein: 4030
I pray you spede us henen that ye may.
It shal be don (quod Simkin) by my fay.
What wol ye don while that it is in hand?
By God, right by the hopper wol I stand,
(Quod John) and seen how that the corn gas in.
Yet saw I never by my fader kin,
How that the hopper wagges til and fra.
Alein answered; John, and wolt thou swa? 4038
Than wol I be benethe by my croun,
And see how that the mele falles adoun
In til the trogh, that shal be my disport:
For, John, in faith I may ben of your sort;
I is as ill a miller as is ye.
This miller smiled at hir nicetee,
And thought, all this n'is don but for a wile.
They wenen that no man may hem begile, 4046
But by my thrift yet shal I blere hir eie,
For all the sleighte in hir philosophie.
The more queinte knakkes that they make,
The more wol I stele whan that I take.
In stede of flour yet wol I yeve hem bren.
The gretest clerkes ben not the wisest men,
As whilom to the wolf thus spake the mare:
Of all hir art ne count I not a tare.
Out at the dore he goth ful prively, 4055

Whan that he saw his time softely. 4056
He loketh up and doun, til he hath found
The clerkes hors, ther as he stood ybound
Behind the mille, under a levesell:
And to the hors he goth him faire and well,
And stripeth of the bridel right anon.
  And whan the hors was laus, he gan to gon
Toward the fen, ther wilde mares renne,
And forth, with wehee, thurgh thick and thinne. 4064
This miller goth again, no word he said,
But doth his note, and with these clerkes plaid,
Till that hir corn was faire and wel yground.
And whan the mele is sacked and ybound,
This John goth out, and fint his hors away,
And gan to crie, harow and wala wa!
Our hors is lost: Alein, for Goddes banes,
Step on thy feet; come of, man, al at anes: 4072
Alas our wardein has his palfrey lorn.
  This Alein al forgat both mele and corn;
Al was out of his mind his husbandrie:
What, whilke way is he gon? he gan to crie.
  The wif came leping inward at a renne,
She sayd; Alas! youre hors goth to the fenne
With wilde mares, as fast as he may go.
Unthank come on his hand that bond him so,
And he that better shuld have knit the rein. 4081

Alas! (quod John) Alein, for Cristes pein 4082
Lay doun thy swerd, and I shal min alswa.
I is ful wight, God wate, as is a ra.
By Goddes saule he shal not scape us bathe.
Why ne had thou put the capel in the lathe?
Ill haile, Alein, by God thou is a fonne.
These sely clerkes han ful fast yronne
Toward the fen, bothe Alein and eke John:
And whan the miller saw that they were gon, 4090
He half a bushel of hir flour hath take,
And bad his wif go knede it in a cake.
He sayd; I trow, the clerkes were aferde.
Yet can a miller make a clerkes berde,
For all his art. Ye, let hem gon hir way.
Lo wher they gon. Ye, let the children play:
They get him not so lightly by my croun.
These sely clerkes rennen up and doun 4098
With kepe, kepe; stand, stand; jossa, warderere.
Ga whistle thou, and I shal kepe him here.
But shortly, til that it was veray night
They coude not, though they did all hir might,
Hir capel catch, he ran alway so fast:
Til in a diche they caught him at the last.
Wery and wet, as bestes in the rain,
Cometh sely John, and with him cometh Alein.
Alas (quod John) the day that I was borne! 4107

Now are we driven til hething and til scorne. 4108
Our corn is stolne, men wol us fonnes calle,
Both the wardein, and eke our felawes alle,
And namely the miller, wala wa!
  Thus plaineth John, as he goth by the way
Toward the mille, and bayard in his hond.
The miller sitting by the fire he fond,
For it was night, and forther might they nought,
But for the love of God they him besought 4116
Of herberwe and of ese, as for hir peny.
  The miller saide agen, if ther be any,
Swiche as it is, yet shull ye have your part.
Myn hous is streit, but ye have lerned art;
Ye can by arguments maken a place
A mile brode, of twenty foot of space.
Let see now if this place may suffice,
Or make it roume with speche, as is your gise. 4124
Now, Simond, (said this John) by Seint Cuthberd
Ay is thou mery, and this is faire answerd.
I have herd say, man sal take of twa thinges,
Slike as he findes, or slike as he bringes.
But specially I pray thee, hoste dere,
Gar us have mete and drinke, and make us chere,
And we sal paien trewely at the full:
With empty hand, men may na haukes tull.
Lo here our silver redy for to spend. 4133

This miller to the toun his doughter send 4134
For ale and bred, and rosted hem a goos,
And bond hir hors, he shuld no more go loos:
And in his owen chambre hem made a bedde,
With shetes and with chalons faire yspredde,
Nat from his owen bed ten foot or twelve:
His doughter had a bed all by hire selve,
Right in the same chambre by and by:
It mighte be no bet, and cause why, 4142
Ther was no roumer herberwe in the place.
They soupen, and they speken of solace,
And drinken ever strong ale at the best.
Abouten midnight wente they to rest.
Wel hath this miller vernished his hed,
Ful pale he was, for-dronken, and nought red.
He yoxeth, and he speketh thurgh the nose,
As he were on the quakke, or on the pose. 4150
To bed he goth, and with him goth his wif;
As any jay she light was and jolif,
So was hire joly whistle wel ywette.
The cradel at hire beddes feet was sette,
To rocken, and to yeve the child to souke.
And whan that dronken was all in the crouke
To bedde went the doughter right anon,
To bedde goth Alein, and also John.
Ther n'as no more; nedeth hem no dwale. 4159

This miller hath so wisly bibbed ale, 4160
That as an hors he snorteth in his slepe,
Ne of his tail behind he toke no kepe.
His wif bare him a burdon a ful strong;
Men might hir routing heren a furlong.
The wenche routeth eke *par compagnie.*
  Alein the clerk that herd this melodie,
He poketh John, and sayde : Slepest thou ?
Herdest thou ever slike a song er now ? 4168
Lo whilke a complin is ymell hem alle.
A wilde fire upon hir bodies falle,
Wha herkned ever slike a ferly thing ?
Ye, they shall have the flour of yvel ending.
This lange night ther tides me no reste.
But yet na force, all shal be for the beste.
For, John, (sayd he) as ever mote I thrive,
If that I may, yon wenche wol I swive. 4176
Som esement has lawe yshapen us.
For, John, ther is a lawe that saieth thus,
That if a man in o point be agreved,
That in another he shal be releved.
Our corn is stolne, sothly it is na nay,
And we han had an yvel fit to-day.
And sin I shal have nan amendement
Again my losse I wol have an esement :
By Goddes saule, it shal nan other be. 4185

This John answered; Alein, avise thee : 4186
The miller is a perilous man, he sayde.
And if that he out of his slepe abraide,
He mighte don us bathe a vilanie.
Alein answered; I count him nat a flie.
And up he rist, and by the wenche he crept.
This wenche lay upright, and faste slept,
Til he so nigh was, er she might espie,
That it had ben to late for to crie : 4194
And shortly for to say, they were at on.
Now play, Alein, for I wol speke of John.
This John lith still a furlong way or two,
And to himself he maketh routh and wo.
Alas! (quod he) this is a wicked jape;
Now may I say, that I is but an ape.
Yet has my felaw somwhat for his harme;
He has the millers doughter in his arme : 4202
He auntred him, and hath his nedes spedde,
And I lie as a draf sak in my bedde;
And whan this jape is tald another day,
I shal be halden a daffe or a cokenay:
I wol arise, and auntre it by my fay :
Unhardy is unsely, thus men say.
And up he rose and softely he went
Unto the cradel, and in his hand it hent,
And bare it soft unto his beddes fete. 4211

Sone after this the wif hire routing lete, 4212
And gan awake, and went hire out to pisse,
And came again, and gan the cradel misse,
And groped here and ther, but she fond non.
Alas! (quod she) I had almost misgon.
I had almost gon to the clerkes bedde.
Ey *benedicite*, than had I foule yspedde.
And forth she goth, til she the cradel fond.
She gropeth alway forther with hire hond, 4220
And fond the bed, and thoughte nat but good,
Because that the cradel by it stood,
And n'iste wher she was, for it was derk,
But faire and wel she crept in by the clerk,
And lith ful still, and wold han caught a slepe.
Within a while this John the clerk up lepe,
And on this goode wif he laieth on sore;
So mery a fit ne had she nat ful yore. 4228
He priketh hard and depe, as he were mad.
  This joly lif han these two clerkes lad,
Til that the thridde cok began to sing.
Alein wex werie in the morwening,
For he had swonken all the longe night,
And sayd; Farewel, Malkin, my swete wight.
The day is come, I may no longer bide,
But evermo, wher so I go or ride,
I is thin awen clerk, so have I hele. 4237

Now, dere lemman, quod she, go farewele : 4238
But or thou go, o thing I wol thee tell.
Whan that thou wendest homeward by the mell,
Right at the entree of the dore behind
Thou shalt a cake of half a bushel find,
That was ymaked of thin owen mele,
Which that I halpe my fader for to stele.
And goode lemman, God thee save and kepe.
And with that word she gan almost to wepe. 4246
  Alein uprist and thought, er that it daw
I wol go crepen in by my felaw :
And fond the cradel at his hand anon.
By God, thought he, all wrang I have misgon :
My hed is tottie of my swink to night,
That maketh me that I go nat aright.
I wot wel by the cradel I have misgo ;
Here lith the miller and his wif also. 4254
And forth he goth a twenty divel way
Unto the bed, ther as the miller lay.
He wend have cropen by his felaw John,
And by the miller in he crept anon,
And caught him by the nekke, and gan him shake,
And sayd ; Thou John, thou swineshed awake,
For Cristes saule, and here a noble game :
For by that lord that called is Seint Jame,
As I have thries as in this short night 4263

Swived the millers doughter bolt upright,
While thou hast as a coward ben agast.
  Ye, false harlot, quod the miller, hast?
A, false traitour, false clerk, (quod he)
Thou shalt be ded by Goddes dignitee,
Who dorste be so bold to disparage
My doughter, that is come of swiche linage.
And by the throte-bolle he caught Alein,
And he him hent despitously again,
And on the nose he smote him with his fist;
Doun ran the blody streme upon his brest:
And in the flore with nose and mouth to-broke
They walwe, as don two-pigges in a poke.
And up they gon, and doun again anon,
Til that the miller sporned at a ston,
And doun he fell backward upon his wif,
That wiste nothing of this nice strif:
For she was fall aslepe a litel wight
With John the clerk, that waked had all night:
And with the fall out of hire slepe she braide.
Helpe, holy crois of Bromeholme, (she sayde)
In manus tuas, Lord, to thee I call.
Awake, Simond, the fend is on me fall;
Myn herte is broken; helpe; I n'am but ded;
Ther lith on up my wombe and up myn hed.
Helpe, Simkin, for the false clerkes fight.

This John stert up as fast as ever he might,
And graspeth by the walles to and fro
To find a staf, and she stert up also,
And knew the estres bet than did this John,
And by the wall she toke a staf anon:
And saw a litel shemering of a light,
For at an hole in shone the mone bright,
And by that light she saw hem bothe two,
But sikerly she n'iste who was who,
But as she saw a white thing in hire eye.
And whan she gan this white thing espie,
She wend the clerk had wered a volupere;
And with the staf she drow ay nere and nere,
And wend han hit this Alein atte full,
And smote the miller on the pilled skull,
That doun he goth, and cried, harow! I die.
Thise clerkes bete him wel, and let him lie,
And greithen hem, and take hir hors anon,
And eke hir mele, and on hir way they gon:
And at the mille dore eke they toke hir cake
Of half a bushel flour, ful wel ybake.
Thus is the proude miller wel ybete,
And hath ylost the grinding of the whete,
And paied for the souper every del
Of Alein and of John, that bete him wel;
His wif is swived, and his doughter als;

Lo, swiche it is a miller to be fals. 4316
And therfore this proverbe is sayd ful soth,
Him thar not winnen wel that evil doth;
A gilour shal himself begiled be:
And God that siteth hie in magestee
Save all this compagnie, gret and smale.
Thus have I quit the miller in my tale. 4322

THE COKES PROLOGUE.

The Coke of London, while the Reve spake,
For joye (him thought) he clawed him on the bak:
A ha (quod he) for Cristes passion,
This miller had a sharpe conclusion,
Upon this argument of herbergage.
Wel sayde Salomon in his langage,
Ne bring not every man into thin hous, 4329
For herberwing by night is perilous.
Wel ought a man avised for to be
Whom that he brought into his privetee.
I pray to God so yeve me sorwe and care,
If ever, sithen I highte Hodge of Ware,
Herd I a miller bet ysette a-werk;
He had a jape of malice in the derk.
But God forbede that we stinten here,
And therfore if ye vouchen sauf to here 4338

A tale of me that am a poure man, 4339
I wol you tell as wel as ever I can
A litel jape that fell in our citee.
  Our Hoste answerd and sayde; I grant it thee:
Now tell on, Roger, and loke that it be good,
For many a pastee hast thou letten blood,
And many a Jacke of Dover hast thou sold,
That hath been twies hot and twies cold.
Of many a pilgrim hast thou Cristes curse, 4347
For of thy perselee yet fare they the werse,
That they han eten in thy stoble goos:
For in thy shop goth many a flie loos.
Now tell on, gentil Roger by thy name,
But yet I pray thee be not wroth for game;
A man may say ful soth in game and play.
  Thou sayst ful soth, quod Roger, by my fay;
But soth play *quade spel*, as the Fleming saith: 4355
And therfore, Herry Bailly, by thy faith,
Be thou not wroth, or we departen here,
Though that my tale be of an hostelere.
But natheles, I wol not telle it yet,
But er we part, ywis thou shalt be quit.
And therwithal he lough and made chere,
And sayd his tale, as ye shul after here. 4362

THE COKES TALE.

A PRENTIS whilom dwelt in our citee, 4363
And of a craft of vitaillers was he;
Gaillard he was, as goldfinch in the shawe,
Broune as a bery, a propre short felawe:
With lokkes blake, kembed ful fetisly.
Dancen he coude so wel and jolily,
That he was cleped Perkin Revelour.
He was as ful of love and paramour, 4370
As is the hive ful of hony swete;
Wel was the wenche with him mighte mete.
At every bridale would he sing and hoppe;
He loved bet the taverne than the shoppe.
For whan ther any riding was in Chepe,
Out of the shoppe thider wold he lepe,
And til that he had all the sight ysein,
And danced wel, he wold not come agein; 4378
And gadred him a meinie of his sort,
To hoppe and sing, and maken swiche disport:
And ther they setten steven for to mete
To plaien at the dis in swiche a strete.
For in the toun ne was ther no prentis,
That fairer coude caste a pair of dis
Than Perkin coude, and therto he was fre
Of his dispence, in place of privetee. 4386

That fond his maister wel in his chaffare, 4387
For often time he fond his box ful bare.
  For sothly, a prentis, a revelour,
That hanteth dis, riot and paramour,
His maister shal it in his shoppe abie,
Al have he no part of the minstralcie.
For theft and riot they ben convertible,
Al can they play on giterne or ribible.
Revel and trouth, as in a low degree, 4395
They ben ful wroth all day, as men may see.
  This joly prentis with his maister abode,
Til he was neigh out of his prentishode,
Al were he snibbed bothe erly and late,
And somtime lad with revel to Newgate.
But at the last his maister him bethought
Upon a day, whan he his paper sought,
Of a proverbe, that saith this same word; 4403
Wel bet is roten appel out of hord,
Than that it rote alle the remenant:
So fareth it by a riotous servant;
It is wel lasse harm to let him pace,
Than he shende all the servants in the place.
Therfore his maister yaf him a quitance,
And bad him go, with sorwe and with meschance.
And thus this joly prentis had his leve:
Now let him riot all the night or leve. 4412

And for ther n'is no thefe without a louke, 4413
That helpeth him to wasten and to souke
Of that he briben can, or borwe may,
Anon he sent his bed and his array
Unto a compere of his owen sort,
That loved dis, and riot, and disport;
And had a wif, that held for contenance
A shoppe, and swived for hire sustenance. 4420

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THE MAN OF LAWES PROLOGUE.

OUR Hoste saw wel, that the brighte sonne
The ark of his artificial day had ronne
The fourthe part, and half an houre and more;
And though he were not depe expert in lore,
He wiste it was the eighte and twenty day 4425
Of April, that is messager to May;
And saw wel that the shadow of every tree
Was as in lengthe of the same quantitee
That was the body erect, that caused it;
And therfore by the shadow he toke his wit,
That Phebus, which that shone so clere and bright,
Degrees was five and fourty clombe on hight;
And for that day, as in that latitude,
It was ten of the clok, he gan conclude; 4434

And sodenly he plight his hors aboute. 4435
  Lordings, quod he, I warne you all this route,
The fourthe partie of this day is gon.
Now for the love of God and of Seint John
Leseth no time, as ferforth as ye may.
Lordings, the time it wasteth night and day,
And steleth from us, what prively sleping,
And what thurgh negligence in our waking,
As doth the streme, that turneth never again, 4443
Descending fro the montagne into a plain.
Wel can Senek and many a philosophre
Bewailen time, more than gold in coffre.
For losse of catel may recovered be,
But losse of time shendeth us, quod he.
It wol not come again withouten drede,
No more than wol Malkins maidenhede,
Whan she hath lost it in hire wantonnesse. 4451
Let us not moulen thus in idelnesse.
  Sire man of Lawe, quod he, so have ye blis,
Tell us a tale anon, as forword is.
Ye ben submitted thurgh your free assent
To stonde in this cas at my jugement.
Acquiteth you now, and holdeth your behest;
Than have ye don your devoir at the lest.
  Hoste, quod he, *de par dieux jeo assente,*
To breken forword is not min entente. 4460

Behest is dette, and I wold hold it fayn 4461
All my behest, I can no better sayn.
For swiche lawe as man yeveth another wight,
He shuld himselven usen it by right.
Thus wol our text: but natheles certain
I can right now no thrifty tale sain,
But Chaucer (though he can but lewedly
On metres and on riming craftily)
Hath sayd hem, in swiche English as he can 4469
Of olde time, as knoweth many a man.
And if he have not sayd hem, leve brother,
In o book, he hath sayd hem in another.
For he hath told of lovers up and doun,
Mo than Ovide made of mentioun
In his *Epistolis*, that ben ful olde.
What shuld I tellen hem, sin they ben tolde?
In youthe he made of Ceys and Alcyon, 4477
And sithen hath he spoke of everich on
Thise noble wives, and thise lovers eke.
Who so that wol his large volume seke
Cleped the seintes legende of Cupide:
Ther may he se the large woundes wide
Of Lucrece, and of Babylon Thisbe;
The swerd of Dido for the false Enee;
The tree of Phillis for hire Demophon;
The plaint of Deianire, and Hermion, 4486

Of Adriane, and Ysiphilee; 4487
The barreine ile stonding in the see;
The dreint Leandre for his fayre Hero;
The teres of Heleine, and eke the wo
Of Briseide, and of Ladomia;
The crueltee of thee, quene Medea,
Thy litel children hanging by the hals,
For thy Jason, that was of love so fals.
Of Hipermestra, Penelope, Alceste, 4495
Your wifhood he commendeth with the beste.
  But certainly no word ne writeth he
Of thilke wicke ensample of Canace,
That loved hire owen brother sinfully;
(Of all swiche cursed stories I say fy)
Or elles of Tyrius Appolonius,
How that the cursed king Antiochus
Beraft his doughter of hire maidenhede, 4503
That is so horrible a tale for to rede,
Whan he hire threw upon the pavement.
And therfore he of ful avisement
N'old never write in non of his sermons
Of swiche unkinde abhominations;
Ne I wol non reherse, if that I may.
But of my tale how shal I don this day?
Me were loth to be likened douteles
To Muses, that men clepe Pierides, 4512

(*Metamorphoseos* wote what I mene) 4513
But natheles I recche not a bene,
Though I come after him with hawebake,
I speke in prose, and let him rimes make.
And with that word, he with a sobre chere
Began his tale, and sayde, as ye shull here.

THE MAN OF LAWES TALE.

O SCATHFUL harm, condition of poverte, 4519
With thirst, with cold, with hunger so confounded,
To asken helpe thee shameth in thin herte,
If thou non ask, so sore art thou ywounded,
That veray nede unwrappeth al thy wound hid.
Maugre thin hed thou must for indigence
Or stele, or begge, or borwe thy dispence.

Thou blamest Crist, and sayst ful bitterly, 526
He misdeparteth richesse temporal;
Thy neighebour thou witest sinfully,
And sayst, thou hast to litel, and he hath all:
Parfay (sayst thou) somtime he reken shall,
Whan that his tayl shal brennen in the glede,
For he nought helpeth needful in hir nede.

Herken what is the sentence of the wise, 4533

Bet is to dien than have indigence. 4534
Thy selve neighebour wol thee despise,
If thou be poure, farewel thy reverence.
Yet of the wise man take this sentence,
Alle the dayes of poure men ben wicke,
Beware therfore or thou come to that pricke.

If thou be poure, thy brother hateth thee,
And all thy frendes fleen fro thee, alas! 4541
O riche marchants, ful of wele ben ye,
O noble, o prudent folk, as in this cas,
Your bagges ben not filled with ambes as,
But with sis cink, that renneth for your chance;
At Cristenmasse mery may ye dance.

Ye seken lond and see for your winninges,
As wise folk ye knowen all th'estat 4548
Of regnes, ye ben fathers of tidinges,
And tales, both of pees and of debat:
I were right now of tales desolat,
N'ere that a marchant, gon is many a yere,
Me taught a tale, which that ye shull here.

In Surrie whilom dwelt a compagnie
Of chapmen rich, and therto sad and trewe, 4555

That wide where senten hir spicerie, 4556
Clothes of gold, and satins riche of hewe.
Hir chaffare was so thrifty and so newe,
That every wight hath deintee to chaffare
With hem, and eke to sellen hem hir ware.

Now fell it, that the maisters of that sort
Han shapen hem to Rome for to wende,
Were it for chapmanhood or for disport, 4563
Non other message wold they thider sende,
But comen hemself to Rome, this is the ende;
And in swiche place as thought hem avantage
For hir entente, they taken hir herbergage.

Sojourned han these marchants in that toun
A certain time, as fell to hir plesance:
And so befell, that the excellent renoun 4570
Of the emperoures doughter dame Custance
Reported was, with every circumstance,
Unto these Surrien marchants, in swiche wise
Fro day to day, as I shal you devise,

This was the commun vois of every man;
Our emperour of Rome, God him se,
A doughter hath, that sin the world began,
To reken as wel hire goodnesse as beaute, 4578

N'as never swiche another as is she : 4579
I pray to God in honour hire sustene,
And wold she were of all Europe the quene.

In hire is high beaute withouten pride,
Youthe, withouten grenehed or folie :
To all hire werkes vertue is hire guide ;
Humblesse hath slaien in hire tyrannie :
She is a mirrour of alle curtesie, 4586
Hire herte is veray chambre of holinesse,
Hire hond ministre of fredom for almesse.

And al this vois was soth, as God is trewe,
But now to purpos let us turne agein.
These marchants han don fraught hir shippes newe,
And whan they han this blisful maiden sein,
Home to Surrie ben they went ful fayn, 4593
And don hir nedes, as they han don yore,
And liven in wele, I can say you no more.

Now fell it, that these marchants stood in grace
Of him that was the Soudan of Surrie :
For whan they came from any strange place
He wold of his benigne curtesie
Make hem good chere, and besily espie 4600

Tidings of sundry regnes, for to lere 4601
The wonders that they mighte seen or here.

Amonges other thinges specially
These marchants han him told of dame Custance
So gret noblesse, in ernest seriously,
That this Soudan hath caught so gret plesance
To han hire figure in his remembrance,
That all his lust, and all his besy cure 4608
Was for to love hire, while his lif may dure.

Paraventure in thilke large book,
Which that men clepe the heven, ywriten was
With sterres, whan that he his birthe took,
That he for love shuld han his deth, alas!
For in the sterres, clerer than is glas,
Is writen, God wot, who so coud it rede, 4615
The deth of every man withouten drede.

In sterres many a winter therbeforn
Was writ the deth of Hector, Achilles,
Of Pompey, Julius, or they were born;
The strif of Thebes; and of Hercules,
Of Sampson, Turnus, and of Socrates
The deth; but mennes wittes ben so dull,
That no wight can wel rede it at the full. 4623

This Soudan for his prive councel sent, 4624
And shortly of this matere for to pace,
He hath to hem declared his entent,
And sayd hem certain, but he might have grace
To han Custance, within a litel space,
He n'as but ded, and charged hem in hie
To shapen for his lif som remedie.

Diverse men, diverse thinges saiden; 4631
They argumentes casten up and doun;
Many a subtil reson forth they laiden;
They speken of magike, and abusion;
But finally, as in conclusion,
They cannot seen in that non avantage,
Ne in non other way, save mariage.

Than saw they therin swiche difficultee 4638
By way of reson, for to speke all plain,
Because ther was swiche diversitee
Betwene hir bothe lawes, that they sayn,
They trowen that no cristen prince wold fayn
Wedden his child under our lawe swete,
That us was yeven by Mahound our prophete.

And he answered: Rather than I lese
Custance, I wol be cristened douteles: 4646

I mote ben hires, I may non other chese, 4647
I pray you hold your arguments in pees,
Saveth my lif, and beth not reccheles
To geten hire that hath my lif in cure,
For in this wo I may not long endure.

What nedeth greter dilatation?
I say, by tretise and ambassatrie,
And by the popes mediation, 4654
And all the chirche, and all the chevalrie,
That in destruction of Maumetrie,
And in encrese of Cristes lawe dere,
They ben accorded so as ye may here;

How that the Soudan and his baronage,
And all his lieges shuld ycristened be,
And he shal han Custance in mariage, 4661
And certain gold, I n'ot what quantitee,
And hereto finden suffisant suretee.
The same accord is sworne on eyther side;
Now, fair Custance, almighty God thee gide.

Now wolden som men waiten, as I gesse,
That I shuld tellen all the purveiance,
The which that the emperour of his noblesse
Hath shapen for his doughter dame Custance 4669

Wel may men know that so gret ordinance 4670
May no man tellen in a litel clause,
As was arraied for so high a cause.

Bishopes ben shapen with hire for to wende,
Lordes, ladies, and knightes of renoun,
And other folk ynow, this is the end.
And notified is thurghout al the toun,
That every wight with gret devotioun 4677
Shuld prayen Crist, that he this mariage
Receive in gree, and spede this viage.

The day is comen of hire departing,
I say the woful day fatal is come,
That ther may be no longer tarying,
But forward they hem dressen all and some.
Custance, that was with sorwe all overcome, 4684
Ful pale arist, and dresseth hire to wende,
For wel she seth ther n'is non other ende.

Alas! what wonder is it though she wept?
That shal be sent to straunge nation
Fro frendes, that so tendrely hire kept,
And to be bounde under subjection
Of on, she knoweth not his condition. 4691

Housbondes ben all good, and han ben yore, 4692
That knowen wives, I dare say no more.

Fader, (she said) thy wretched child Custance,
Thy yonge doughter, fostered up so soft,
And ye, my moder, my soveraine plesance
Over all thing, (out taken Crist on loft)
Custance your child hire recommendeth oft
Unto your grace; for I shal to Surrie, 4699
Ne shal I never seen you more with eye.

Alas! unto the Barbare nation
I muste gon, sin that it is your will:
But Crist, that starfe for our redemption,
So yeve me grace his hestes to fulfill,
I wretched woman no force though I spill;
Women arn borne to thraldom and penance, 4706
And to ben under mannes governance.

I trow at Troye whan Pirrus brake the wall,
Or Ilion brent, or Thebes the citee,
Ne at Rome for the harm thurgh Hanniball,
That Romans hath venqueshed times three,
N'as herd swiche tendre weping for pitee,
As in the chambre was for hire parting,
But forth she mote, wheder she wepe or sing. 4714

O firste moving cruel firmament, 4715
With thy diurnal swegh that croudest ay,
And hurtlest all from Est til Occident,
That naturally wold hold another way;
Thy crouding set the heven in swiche array
At the beginning of this fierce viage,
That cruel Mars hath slain this marriage.

Infortunat ascendent tortuous, 4722
Of which the lord is helpeles fall, alas!
Out of his angle into the derkest hous.
O Mars, o Atyzar, as in this cas;
O feble Mone, unhappy ben thy pas,
Thou knittest thee ther thou art not received,
Ther thou were wel fro thennes art thou weived.

Imprudent emperour of Rome, alas! 4729
Was ther no philosophre in al thy toun?
Is no time bet than other in swiche cas?
Of viage is ther non electioun,
Namely to folk of high conditioun,
Nat whan a rote is of a birth yknowe?
Alas! we ben to lewed, or to slow.

To ship is brought this woful faire maid
Solempnely, with every circumstance: 4737

Now Jesu Crist be with you all, she said. 4738
Ther n'is no more, but farewel fair Custance.
She peineth hire to make good countenance,
And forth I let hire sayle in this manere,
And turne I wol againe to my matere.

The mother of the Soudan, well of vices,
Espied hath hire sones pleine entente,
How he wol lete his olde sacrifices : 4745
And right anon she for her conseil sente,
And they ben comen, to know what she mente,
And whan assembled was this folk in fere,
She set hire doun, and sayd as ye shul here.

Lordes, (she sayd) ye knowen everich on,
How that my sone in point is for to lete
The holy lawes of our Alkaron, 4752
Yeven by Goddes messager Mahomete :
But on avow to grete God I hete,
The lif shal rather out of my body sterte,
Than Mahometes lawe out of myn herte.

What shuld us tiden of this newe lawe
But thraldom to our bodies and penance,
And afterward in helle to ben drawe,
For we reneied Mahound our creance ? 4760

But, lordes, wol ye maken assurance,
As I shal say, assenting to my lore ?
And I shal make us sauf for evermore.

They sworen, and assented every man
To live with hire and die, and by hire stond:
And everich on, in the best wise he can,
To strengthen hire shal all his frendes fond.
And she hath this emprise ytaken in hond,
Which ye shull heren that I shal devise,
And to hem all she spake right in this wise.

We shul first feine us cristendom to take ;
Cold water shal not greve us but a lite:
And I shal swiche a feste and revel make,
That, as I trow, I shal the Soudan quite.
For tho his wif be cristened never so white,
She shal have nede to wash away the rede,
Though she a font of water with hire lede.

O Soudannesse, rote of iniquitee,
Virago thou Semyramee the second,
O serpent under femininitee,
Like to the serpent depe in helle ybound :
O feined woman, all that may confound

Vertue and innocence, thurgh thy malice 4783
Is bred in thee, as nest of every vice.

O Sathan envious, sin thilke day
That thou were chased from our heritage,
Wel knowest thou to woman the olde way.
Thou madest Eva bring us in servage,
Thou wolt fordon this cristen mariage:
Thin instrument so (wala wa the while!) 4790
Makest thou of women whan thou wolt begile.

This Soudannesse, whom I thus blame and warrie,
Let prively hire conseil gon hir way:
What shuld I in this tale longer tarie?
She rideth to the Soudan on a day,
And sayd him, that she wold reneie hire lay,
And cristendom of prestes hondes fong, 4797
Repenting hire she hethen was so long;

Beseching him to don hire that honour,
That she might han the cristen folk to fest:
To plesen hem I wol do my labour.
The Soudan saith, I wol don at your hest,
And kneling, thanked hire of that request;
So glad he was, he n'iste not what to say,
She kist hire sone, and home she goth hire way. 4805

Arrived ben these cristen folk to lond 4806
In Surrie, with a gret solempne route,
And hastily this Soudan sent his sond,
First to his mother, and all the regne aboute,
And sayd, his wif was comen out of doute,
And praide hem for to riden again the quene,
The honour of his regne to sustene.

Gret was the presse, and riche was th'array 4813
Of Surriens and Romanes met in fere.
The mother of the Soudan riche and gay
Received hire with all so glad a chere,
As any mother might hire doughter dere:
And to the nexte citee ther beside
A softe pas solempnely they ride.

Nought trow I, the triumph of Julius, 4820
Of which that Lucan maketh swiche a bost,
Was realler, or more curious,
Than was th'assemblee of this blisful host:
But te this Scorpion, this wicked gost,
The Soudannesse, for all hire flattering
Cast under this ful mortally to sting.

The Soudan cometh himself sone after this
So really, that wonder is to tell: 4828

And welcometh hire with alle joye and blis. 4829
And thus in mirth and joye I let hem dwell.
The fruit of this matere is that I tell.
Whan time came, men thought it for the best
That revel stint, and men go to hir rest.

The time come is, this olde Soudannesse
Ordeined hath the feste of which I tolde,
And to the feste cristen folk hem dresse 4836
In general, ya bothe yonge and olde.
Ther may men fest and realtee beholde,
And deintees mo than I can you devise,
But all to dere they bought it or they rise.

O soden wo, that ever art successour
To worldly blis, spreint is with bitternesse
Th' ende of the joye of our worldly labour : 4843
Wo occupieth the fyn of our gladnesse.
Herken this conseil for thy sikernesse :
Upon thy glade day have in thy minde
The unware wo of harm, that cometh behinde.

For shortly for to tellen at a word,
The Soudan and the cristen everich on
Ben all to-hewe, and stiked at the bord,
But it were only dame Custance alone. 4851

This olde Soudannesse, this cursed crone, 4852
Hath with hire frendes don this cursed dede,
For she hireself wold all the contree lede.

Ne ther was Surrien non that was converted,
That of the conseil of the Soudan wot,
That he n'as all to-hewe, er he asterted:
And Custance han they taken anon fote-hot,
And in a ship all stereles (God wot) 4859
They han hire set, and bidden hire lerne sayle
Out of Surrie againward to Itaille.

A certain tresor that she thither ladde,
And soth to sayn, vitaille gret plentee,
They han hire yeven, and clothes eke she hadde,
And forth she sayleth in the salte see;
O my Custance, ful of benignitee, 4866
O emperoures yonge doughter dere,
He that is lord of fortune be thy stere.

She blesseth hire, and with ful pitous vois
Unto the crois of Crist thus sayde she.
O clere, o weleful auter, holy crois,
Red of the lambes blood ful of pitee,
That wesh the world fro the old iniquitee, 4873

Me fro the fende, and fro his clawes kepe, 4874
That day that I shal drenchen in the depe.

Victorious tree, protection of trewe,
That only worthy were for to bere
The king of heven, with his woundes newe,
The white lamb, that hurt was with a spere;
Flemer of fendes, out of him and here
On which thy limmes faithfully extenden, 4881
Me kepe, and yeve me might my lif to amenden.

Yeres and dayes fleet this creature
Thurghout the see of Grece, unto the straite
Of Maroc, as it was hire aventure:
On many a sory mele now may she baite,
After hire deth ful often may she waite,
Or that the wilde waves wol hire drive 4888
Unto the place ther as she shal arive.

Men mighten asken, why she was not slain?
Eke at the feste who might hire body save?
And I answer to that demand again,
Who saved Daniel in the horrible cave,
Ther every wight, save he, master or knave,
Was with the leon frette, or he asterte?
No wight but God, that he bare in his herte. 4896

God list to shew his wonderful miracle 4897
In hire, for we shuld seen his mighty werkes:
Crist, which that is to every harm triacle,
By certain menes oft, as knowen clerkes,
Doth thing for certain ende, that ful derke is
To mannes wit, that for our ignorance
Ne can nat know his prudent purveiance.

Now sith she was not at the feste yslawe, 4904
Who kepte hire fro the drenching in the see?
Who kepte Jonas in the fishes mawe,
Til he was spouted up at Ninivee?
Wel may men know, it was no wight but he
That kept the peple Ebraike fro drenching,
With drye feet thurghout the see passing.

Who bade the foure spirits of tempest, 4911
That power han to anoyen lond and see,
Both north and south, and also west and est,
Anoyen neyther see, ne lond, ne tree?
Sothly the commander of that was he
That fro the tempest ay this woman kepte,
As wel when she awoke as whan she slepte.

Wher might this woman mete and drinke have?
Three yere and more, how lasteth hire vitaille? 4919

Who fed the Egyptian Mary in the cave 4920
Or in desert? no wight but Crist *sans faille.*
Five thousand folk it was as gret marvaille
With loves five and fishes two to fede:
God sent his foyson at hire grete nede.

She driveth forth into our Ocean
Thurghout our wide see, til at the last
Under an hold, that nempnen I ne can, 4927
Fer in Northumberlond, the wave hire cast,
And in the sand hire ship stiked so fast,
That thennes wolde it not in all a tide:
The wille of Crist was that she shulde abide.

The constable of the castle doun is fare
To seen this wrecke, and al the ship he sought,
And fond this wery woman ful of care; 4934
He fond also the tresour that she brought:
In hire langage mercy she besought,
The lif out of hire body for to twinne,
Hire to deliver of wo that she was inne.

A maner Latin corrupt was hire speche,
But algate therby was she understond.
The constable, whan him list no lenger seche,
This woful woman brought he to the lond. 4942

She kneleth doun, and thanketh Goddes sond; 4943
But what she was, she wolde no man seye
For foule ne faire, though that she shulde deye.

She said, she was so mased in the see,
That she forgate hire minde, by hire trouth.
The constable hath of hire so gret pitee
And eke his wif, that they wepen for routh:
She was so diligent withouten slouth 4950
To serve and plesen everich in that place,
That all hire love, that loken in hire face.

The constable and dame Hermegild his wif
Were payenes, and that contree every wher;
But Hermegild loved Custance as hire lif;
And Custance hath so long sojourned ther
In orisons, with many a bitter tere, 4957
Til Jesu hath converted thurgh his grace
Dame Hermegild, constablesse of that place.

In all that lond no cristen dorste route;
All cristen folk ben fled fro that contree
Thurgh payenes, that conquereden all aboute
The plages of the North by lond and see.
To Wales fled the cristianitee 4964

Of olde Bretons, dwelling in this ile; 4965
Ther was hir refuge for the mene while.

But yet n'ere cristen Bretons so exiled,
That ther n'ere som which in hir privitee
Honoured Crist, and hethen folk begiled;
And neigh the castle swiche ther dwelten three:
That on of hem was blind, and might not see,
But it were with thilke eyen of his minde, 4972
With which men mowen see whan they ben blinde.

Bright was the sonne, as in that sommers day,
For which the constable and his wif also
And Custance, han ytake the righte way
Toward the see, a furlong way or two,
To plaien, and to romen to and fro;
And in hir walk this blinde man they mette, 4979
Croked and olde, with eyen fast yshette.

In the name of Crist (cried this blinde Breton)
Dame Hermegild, yeve me my sight again.
This lady wexe afraied of that soun,
Lest that hire husbond, shortly for to sain,
Wold hire for Jesu Cristes love have slain,
Til Custance made hire bold, and bad hire werche
The will of Crist, as doughter of holy cherche. 4987

The constable wexe abashed of that sight, 4988
And sayde; What amounteth all this fare?
Custance answered; Sire, it is Cristes might,
That helpeth folk out of the fendes snare:
And so ferforth she gan our lay declare,
That she the constable, er that it were eve,
Converted and on Crist made him beleve.

This constable was not lord of the place 4995
Of which I speke, ther as he Custance fond,
But kept it strongly many a winter space,
Under Alla, king of Northumberlond,
That was ful wise, and worthy of his hond
Againe the Scottes, as men may wel here;
But tourne I wol againe to my matere.

Sathan, that ever us waiteth to begile, 5002
Saw of Custance all hire perfectioun,
And cast anon how he might quite hire wile,
And made a yonge knight, that dwelt in that toun,
Love hire so hote of foule affectioun,
That veraily him thought that he shuld spille,
But he of hire might ones han his wille.

He woeth hire, but it availeth nought,
She wolde do no sinne by no wey: 5010

And for despit, he compassed his thought 5011
To maken hire on shameful deth to dey.
He waiteth whan the constable is away,
And prively upon a night he crepte
In Hermegildes chambre while she slepte.

Wery, forwaked in hirè orisons,
Slepeth Custance, and Hermegilde also.
This knight, thurgh Sathanas temptations, 5018
All softely is to the bed ygo,
And cut the throte of Hermegilde atwo,
And layd the blody knif by dame Custance,
And went his way, ther God yeve him mischance.

Sone after cometh this constable home again,
And eke Alla, that king was of that lond,
And saw his wife despitously yslain, 5025
For which ful oft he wept and wrong his hond;
And in the bed the blody knif he fond
By dame Custance, alas! what might she say?
For veray wo hire wit was all away.

To king Alla was told all this mischance,
And eke the time, and wher, and in what wise,
That in a ship was fonden this Custance,
As here before ye han herd me devise: 5033

The kings herte of pitee gan agrise, 5034
Whan he saw so benigne a creature
Falle in disese and in misaventure.

For as the lamb toward his deth is brought,
So stant this innocent beforn the king:
This false knight, that hath his treason wrought,
Bereth hire in hond that she hath don this thing:
But natheles ther was gret murmuring 5041
Among the peple, and sayn they cannot gesse
That she had don so gret a wickednesse.

For they han seen hire ever so vertuous,
And loving Hermegild right as hire lif:
Of this bare witnesse everich in that hous,
Save he that Hermegild slow with his knif:
This gentil king hath caught a gret motif 5048
Of this witness, and thought he wold enquere
Deper in this cas, trouthe for to lere.

Alas! Custance, thou hast no champion,
Ne fighten canst thou not, so wala wa!
But he that starf for our redemption,
And bond Sathan, and yet lith ther he lay,
So be thy stronge champion this day: 5055

For but if Crist on thee miracle kithe, 5056
Withouten gilt thou shalt be slaine as swithe.

She set hire doun on knees, and thus she sayde;
Immortal God, that savedest Susanne
Fro false blame, and thou merciful mayde,
Mary I mene, doughter to seint Anne,
Beforn whos child angels singen Osanne,
If I be gilteles of this felonie, 5063
My socour be, or elles shal I die.

Have ye not seen somtime a pale face
(Among a prees) of him that hath ben lad
Toward his deth, wher as he geteth no grace,
And swiche a colour in his face hath had,
Men mighten know him that was so bestad,
Amonges all the faces in that route, 5070
To stant Custance, and loketh hire aboute.

O quenes living in prosperitee,
Duchesses, and ye ladies everich on,
Haveth som routhe on hire adversitee;
An emperoures doughter stant alone;
She hath no wight to whom to make hire mone:
O blood real, that stondest in this drede,
Fer ben thy frendes in thy grete nede. 5078

This Alla king hath swiche compassioun, 5079
As gentil herte is fulfilled of pitee,
That fro his eyen ran the water doun.
Now hastily do fecche a book, quod he;
And if this knight wol sweren, how that she
This woman slow, yet wol we us avise,
Whom that we wol that shal ben our justice.

A Breton book, written with Evangiles, 5086
Was fet, and on this book he swore anon
She giltif was, and in the mene whiles
An hond him smote upon the nekke bone,
That doun he fell at ones as a stone:
And both his eyen brost out of his face
In sight of every body in that place.

A vois was herd, in general audience, 5093
That sayd; Thou hast desclandred gilteles
The doughter of holy chirche in high presence;
Thus hast thou don, and yet hold I my pees.
Of this mervaille agast was all the prees,
As mased folk they stonden everich on
For drede of wreche, save Custance alone.

Gret was the drede and eke the repentance
Of hem that hadden wronge suspection 5101

Upon this sely innocent Custance; 5102
And for this miracle, in conclusion,
And by Custances mediation,
The king, and many another in that place,
Converted was, thanked be Cristes grace.

This false knight was slain for his untrouthe
By jugement of Alla hastily;
And yet Custance had of his deth gret routhe; 5109
And after this Jesus of his mercy
Made Alla wedden ful solempnely
This holy woman, that is so bright and shene,
And thus hath Crist ymade Custance a quene.

But who was woful (if I shal not lie)
Of this wedding but Donegild and no mo,
The kinges mother, ful of tyrannie? 5116
Hire thoughte hire cursed herte brast atwo;
She wolde not that hire sone had do so;
Hire thoughte a despit, that he shulde take
So strange a creature unto his make.

Me list not of the chaf ne of the stre
Maken so long a tale, as of the corn.
What shulde I tellen of the realtee
Of this mariage, of which cours goth beforn, 5124

Who bloweth in a trompe or in an horn? 5125
The fruit of every tale is for to say;
They ete and drinke, and dance, and sing, and play.

They gon to bed, as it was skill and right,
For though that wives ben ful holy thinges,
They mosten take in patience a night
Swiche maner necessaries, as ben plesinges
To folk that han ywedded hem with ringes, 5132
And lay a lite hir holinesse aside
As for the time, it may no bet betide.

On hire he gat a knave childe anon,
And to a bishop, and his constable eke
He toke his wif to kepe, whan he is gon
To Scotland ward, his fomen for to seke.
Now faire Custance, that is so humble and meke,
So long is gon with childe til that still 5140
She halt hire chambre, abiding Cristes will.

The time is come, a knave child she bere;
Mauricius at the fontstone they him calle.
This constable doth forth come a messager,
And wrote unto his king that cleped was Alle,
How that this blisful tiding is befalle, 5146

And other tidings spedeful for to say. 5147
He hath the lettre, and forth he goth his way.

This messager, to don his avantage,
Unto the kinges mother rideth swithe,
And salueth hire ful faire in his langage.
Madame, quod he, ye may be glad and blithe,
And thanken God an hundred thousand sithe;
My lady quene hath child, withouten doute, 5154
To joye and blisse of all this regne aboute.

Lo here the lettre seled of this thing,
That I most bere in all the hast I may:
If ye wol ought unto your sone the king,
I am your servant bothe night and day.
Donegilde answered, As now at this time nay;
But here I wol all night thou take thy rest, 5161
To-morwe wol I say thee what me lest.

This messager drank sadly ale and wine,
And stolen were his lettres prively
Out of his box, while he slept as a swine;
And contrefeted was ful subtilly
Another lettre, wrought ful sinfully,
Unto the king directe of this matere
Fro his constable, as ye shal after here. 5169

This lettre spake, the quene delivered was 5170
Of so horrible a fendliche creature,
That in the castle non so hardy was
That any while dorste therein endure:
The mother was an elfe by aventure
Ycome, by charmes or by sorcerie,
And everich man hateth hire compagnie. 5176

Wo was this king whan he this lettre had sein,
But to no wight he told his sorwes sore,
But of his owen hand he wrote again;
Welcome the sonde of Crist for evermore
To me, that am now lerned in his lore:
Lord, welcome be thy lust and thy plesance,
My lust I put all in thyn ordinance.

Kepeth this child, al be it foule or faire, 5184
And eke my wif, unto min home coming:
Crist whan him list may senden me an heire,
More agreable than this to my liking.
This lettre he seled, prively weping,
Which to the messager was taken sone,
And forth he goth, ther is no more to done.

O messager fulfilled of dronkenesse,
Strong is thy breth, thy limmes faltren ay, 5192

And thou bewreiest alle secrenesse; 5193
Thy mind is lorne, thou janglest as a jay;
Thy face is tourned in a new array;
Ther dronkenesse regneth in any route,
Ther is no conseil hid withouten doute.

O Donegild, I ne have non English digne
Unto thy malice, and thy tirannie:
And therfore to the fende I thee resigne, 5200
Let him enditen of thy traitorie.
Fy mannish, fy; o nay by God I lie;
Fy fendliche spirit, for I dare wel telle,
Though thou here walke, thy spirit is in helle.

This messager cometh fro the king again,
And at the kinges modres court he light,
And she was of this messager ful fayn, 5207
And plesed him in all that ever she might.
He dranke, and wel his girdel underpight;
He slepeth, and he snoreth in his gise
All night, until the sonne gan arise.

Eft were his lettres stolen everich on,
And contrefeted lettres in this wise.
The king commanded his constable anon
Up peine of hanging and of high jewise, 5215

That he ne shulde soffren in no wise
Custance within his regne for to abide
Three daies and a quarter of a tide;

But in the same ship as he hire fond,
Hire and hire yonge sone, and all hire gere
He shulde put, and croude hire fro the lond,
And charge hire, that she never eft come there.
O my Custance, wel may thy ghost have fere,
And sleping in thy dreme ben in penance,
Whan Donegild cast all this ordinance.

This messager on morwe whan he awoke,
Unto the castel halt the nexte way;
And to the constable he the lettre toke;
And whan that he this pitous lettre sey,
Ful oft he sayd alas, and wala wa;
Lord Crist, quod he, how may this world endure?
So ful of sinne is many a creature.

O mighty God, if that it be thy will,
Sin thou art rightful juge, how may it be
That thou wolt soffren innocence to spill,
And wicked folk regne in prosperitee?
A good Custance, alas! so wo is me,

That I mote be thy turmentour, or dey
On shames deth, ther is non other wey.

Wepen both yong and old in al that place,
Whan that the king this cursed lettre sent:
And Custance with a dedly pale face
The fourthe day toward the ship she went:
But natheles she taketh in good entent
The will of Crist, and kneling on the strond
She sayde, Lord, ay welcome be thy sond.

He that me kepte fro the false blame,
While I was in the lond amonges you,
He can me kepe fro harme and eke fro shame
In the salt see, although I se not how:
As strong as ever he was, he is yet now,
In him trust I, and in his mother dere,
That is to me my sail and eke my stere.

Hire litel child lay weping in hire arm,
And kneling pitously to him she said,
Pees, litel sone, I wol do thee no harm:
With that hire couverchief of hire hed she braid,
And over his litel eyen she it laid,
And in hire arme she lulleth it ful fast,
And into the heven hire eyen up she cast.

Mother, quod she, and mayden bright Marie, 5261
Soth is, that thurgh womannes eggement
Mankind was lorne, and damned ay to die,
For which thy child was on a crois yrent:
Thy blisful eyen saw all his turment,
Than is ther no comparison betwene
Thy wo, and any wo man may sustene.

Thou saw thy child yslain before thin eyen, 5268
And yet now liveth my litel child parfay:
Now, lady bright, to whom all woful crien,
Thou glory of womanhed, thou faire may,
Thou haven of refute, bright sterre of day,
Rew on my child, that of thy gentillesse
Rewest on every rewful in distresse.

O litel child, alas! what is thy gilt, 5275
That never wroughtest sinne as yet parde?
Why wol thin harde father have thee spilt?
O mercy, dere constable, (quod she)
As let my litel child dwell here with thee:
And if thou darst not saven him fro blame,
So kisse him ones in his fadres name.

Therwith she loketh backward to the lond,
And saide; Farewel, housbond routheles! 5283

And up she rist, and walketh doun the strond 5284
Toward the ship, hire foloweth all the prees :
And ever she praieth hire child to hold his pees.
And taketh hire leve, and with an holy entent
She blesseth hire, and into the ship she went.

Vitailled was the ship, it is no drede,
Habundantly for hire a ful long space :
And other necessaries that shuld nede 5291
She had ynow, heried be Goddes grace :
For wind and wether, almighty God purchace,
And bring hire home, I can no better say,
But in the see she driveth forth her way.

Alla the king cometh home sone after this
Unto his castel, of the which I told,
And asketh wher his wif and his child is ; 5298
The constable gan about his herte cold,
And plainly all the matere he him told
As ye han herd, I can tell it no better,
And shewed the king his sele and his letter ;

And saide ; Lord, as ye commanded me
Up peine of deth, so have I don certain.
This messager turmented was, til he
Moste beknowe, and tellen plat and plain, 5306

Fro night to night in what place he had lain : 5307
And thus by wit and subtil enquering
Imagined was by whom this harm gan spring.

The hand was knowen that the lettre wrote,
And all the venime of this cursed dede;
But in what wise, certainly I n'ot.
The effect is this, that Alla out of drede
His moder slew, that moun men blainly rede, 5314
For that she traitour was to hire ligeance :
Thus endeth this old Donegild with meschance.

The sorwe that this Alla night and day
Maketh for his wif and for his child also,
Ther is no tonge that it tellen may.
But now wol I agen to Custance go,
That fleteth in the see in peine and wo 5321
Five yere and more, as liked Cristes sonde,
Or that hire ship approched to the londe.

Under an hethen castel at the last,
(Of which the name in my text I not find)
Custance and eke hire child the see up cast.
Almighty God, that saved all mankind,
Have on Custance and on hire child som mind. 5328

That fallen is in hethen hond eftsone
In point to spill, as I shal tell you sone.

Doun fro the castel cometh ther many a wight
To gauren on this ship, and on Custance:
But shortly fro the castel on a night,
The lordes steward (God yeve him meschance)
A theef, that had reneyed our creance,
Came into the ship alone, and said, he wolde
Hire lemman be, whether she wolde or n'olde.

Wo was this wretched woman tho begon,
Hire childe cried, and she cried pitously:
But blisful Mary halpe hire right anon,
For with hire strogling wel and mightily
The theef fell over bord al sodenly,
And in the see he drenched for vengeance,
And thus hath Crist unwemmed kept Custance.

O foule lust of luxurie, lo thin ende,
Nat only that thou faintest mannes mind,
But veraily thou wolt his body shende.
Th'ende of thy werk, or of thy lustes blind,
Is complaining: how many may men find,
That not for werk somtime, but for th'entent
To don this sinne, ben other slain or shent.

How may this weke woman han the strength 5352
Hire to defend again this renegate?
O Golias, unmesurable of length,
How mighte David maken thee so mate?
So yonge, and of armure so desolate,
How dorst he loke upon thy dredful face?
Wel may men seen it was but Goddes grace.

Who yaf Judith corage or hardinesse
To sleen him Holofernes in his tent, 5359
And to deliver out of wretchednesse
The peple of God? I say for this entent,
That right as God spirit of vigour sent
To hem, and saved hem out of meschance.
So sent he might and vigour to Custance.

Forth goth hire ship thurghout the narwe mouth
Of Jubaltare and Septe, driving alway, 5367
Somtime West, and somtime North and South,
And somtime Est, ful many a wery day:
Til Cristes moder (blessed be she ay)
Hath shapen thurgh hire endeles goodnesse
To make an end of all hire hevinesse.

Now let us stint of Custance but a throw,
And speke we of the Romane emperour, 5374

That out of Surrie hath by lettres knowe
The slaughter of cristen folk, and dishonour
Don to his doughter by a false traitour,
I mene the cursed wicked Soudannesse,
That at the fest let sleen both more and lesse.

For which this emperour hath sent anon
His senatour, with real ordinance,
And other lordes, God wote, many on,
On Surriens to taken high vengeance:
They brennen, sleen, and bring hem to meschance
Ful many a day: but shortly this is th'ende,
Homward to Rome they shapen hem to wende.

This senatour repaireth with victorie
To Rome ward, sayling ful really,
And met the ship driving, as saith the storie,
In which Custance sitteth ful pitously:
Nothing ne knew he what she was, ne why
She was in swiche array, ne she wil sey
Of hire estat, though she shuld dey.

He bringeth hire to Rome, and to his wif
He yaf hire, and hire yonge sone also:
And with the senatour she had hire lif.
Thus can out lady bringen out of wo

Woful Custance, and many another mo:
And longe time dwelled she in that place,
In holy werkes ever, as was hire grace.

The senatoures wif hire aunte was,
But for all that she knew hire never the more:
I wol no longer tarien in this cas,
But to king Alla, which I spake of yore,
That for his wif wepeth and siketh sore,
I wol returne, and let I wol Custance
Under the senatoures governance.

King Alla, which that had his moder slain,
Upon a day fell in swiche repentance,
That if I shortly tellen shal and plain,
To Rome he cometh to receive his penance,
And putte him in the popes ordinance
In high and low, and Jesu Crist besought,
Foryeve his wicked werkes that he had wrought.

The fame anon thurghout the toun is born,
How Alla king shal come on pilgrimage,
By herbergeours that wenten him beforn,
For which the senatour, as was usage,
Rode him againe, and many of his linage,

As wel to shewen his high magnificence, 5420
As to don any king a reverence.

Gret chere doth this noble senatour
To king Alla, and he to him also;
Everich of hem doth other gret honour;
And so befell, that in a day or two
This senatour is to king Alla go
To fest, and shortly, if I shal not lie, 5427
Custances sone went in his compagnie.

Som men wold sain at requeste of Custance
This senatour hath lad this child to feste:
I may not tellen every circumstance,
Be as be may, ther was he at the leste:
But soth is this, that at his mothers heste
Beforn Alla, during the metes space, 5434
The child stood, loking in the kinges face.

This Alla king hath of this child gret wonder,
And to the senatour he said anon,
Whos is that faire child that stondeth yonder?
I n'ot, quod he, by God and by Seint John;
A moder he hath, but fader hath he non,
That I of wote: but shortly in a stound
He told Alla how that this child was found. 5442

But God wot, quod this senatour also, 5443
So vertuous a liver in all my lif
Ne saw I never, as she, ne herd of mo
Of worldly woman, maiden, widewe or wif:
I dare wel sayn hire hadde lever a knif
Thurghout hire brest, than ben a woman wikke,
Ther is no man coude bring hire to that prikke.

Now was this child as like unto Custance 5450
As possible is a creature to be:
This Alla hath the face in remembrance
Of dame Custance, and theron mused he,
If that the childes moder were aught she
That is his wif, and prively he sighte,
And sped him fro the table that he mighte.

Parfay, thought he, fantome is in min hed. 5457
I ought to deme of skilful jugement,
That in the salte see my wif is ded.
And afterward he made his argument;
What wot I, if that Crist have hider sent
My wif by see, as wel as he hire lent
To my contree, fro thennes that she went?

And after noon home with the senatour
Goth Alla, for to see this wonder chance. 5465

This senatour doth Alla gret honour,
And hastily he sent after Custance:
But trusteth wel, hire luste not to dance.
Whan that she wiste wherfore was that sonde,
Unnethe upon hire feet she mighte stonde.

Whan Alla saw his wif, faire he hire grette,
And wept, that it was routhe for to see,
For at the firste look he on hire sette
He knew wel veraily that it was she:
And she for sorwe, domb stant as a tree:
So was hire herte shette in hire distresse,
Whan she remembered his unkindenesse.

Twies she swouneth in his owen sight,
He wepeth and him excuseth pitously:
Now God, quod he, and all his halwes bright
So wisly on my soule as have mercy,
That of your harme as gilteles am I,
As is Maurice my sone, so like your face,
Elles the fend me fetche out of this place.

Long was the sobbing and the bitter peine,
Or that hir woful hertes mighten cese,
Gret was the pitee for to here hem pleine,
Thurgh whiche pleintes gan hir wo encrese,

I pray you all my labour to relese, 5489
I may not tell hir wo until to-morwe,
I am so wery for to speke of sorwe.

But finally, whan that the soth is wist,
That Alla gilteles was of hire wo,
I trow an hundred times han they kist,
And swiche a blisse is ther betwix hem two,
That save the joye that lasteth evermo, 5496
Ther is non like, that any creature
Hath seen or shal, while that the world may dure.

Tho praied she hire husbond mekely
In releef of hire longe pitous pine,
That he wold pray hire fader specially,
That of his magestee he wold encline
To vouchesauf som day with him to dine: 5503
She praied him eke, he shulde by no way
Unto hire fader no word of hire say.

Som men wold sayn, how that the child Maurice
Doth this message until this emperour:
But as I gesse, Alla was not so nice,
To him that is so soveraine of honour,
As he that is of cristen folk the flour, 5510

Send any child, but it is bet to deme 5511
He went himself, and so it may wel seme.

This emperour hath granted gentilly
To come to dinner, as he him besoughte:
And wel rede I, he loked besily
Upon this child, and on his doughter thought.
Alla goth to his inne, and as him ought
Arraied for this feste in every wise, 5518
As ferforth as his conning may suffice.

The morwe came, and Alla gan him dresse,
And eke his wif, this emperour to mete:
And forth they ride in joye and in gladnesse,
And whan she saw hire fader in the strete,
She light adoun and falleth him to fete.
Fader, quod she, your yonge child Custance 5525
Is now ful clene out of your remembrance.

I am your doughter, your Custance, quod she,
That whilom ye han sent into Surrie:
It am I, fader, that in the salte see
Was put alone, and dampned for to die.
Now, goode fader, I you mercy crie,
Send me no more into non hethenesse,
But thanketh my lord here of his kindenesse. 5533

Who can the pitous joye tellen all 5534
Betwix hem thre, sin they ben thus ymette?
But of my tale make an ende I shal,
The day goth fast, I wol no longer lette.
Thise glade folk to dinner ben ysette,
In joy and blisse at mete I let hem dwell,
A thousand fold wel more than I can tell.

This child Maurice was sithen emperour 5541
Made by the pope, and lived cristenly,
To Cristes chirche did he gret honour:
But I let all his storie passen by,
Of Custance is my tale specially,
In the olde Romane gestes men may find
Maurices lif, I bere it not in mind.

This king Alla, whan he his time sey, 5548
With his Custance, his holy wif so swete,
To Englond ben they come the righte wey,
Ther as they live in joye and in quiete.
But litel while it lasteth I you hete,
Joye of this world for time wol not abide,
Fro day to night it changeth as the tide.

Who lived ever in swiche delite o day,
That him ne meved other conscience, 5556

Or ire, or talent, or som kin affray, 5557
Envie, or pride, or passion, or offence?
I ne say but for this end this sentence,
That litel while in joye or in plesance
Lasteth the blisse of Alla with Custance.

For deth, that taketh of hie and low his rente,
Whan passed was a yere, even as I gesse,
Out of this world this king Alla he hente, 5564
For whom Custance hath ful gret hevinesse.
Now let us praien God his soule blesse:
And dame Custance finally to say,
Toward the toun of Rome goth hire way.

To Rome is come this holy creature,
And findeth ther hire frendes hole and sound:
Now is she scaped all hire aventure; 5571
And whan that she hire fader hath yfound,
Doun on hire knees falleth she to ground,
Weping for tendernesse in herte blithe
She herieth God an hundred thousand sithe.

In vertue and in holy almesse dede
They liven alle, and never asonder wende;
Till deth departeth hem, this lif they lede:
And fareth now wel, my tale is at an ende. 5579

Now Jesu Crist, that of his might may sende
Joye after wo, governe us in his grace,
And kepe us alle that ben in this place.

THE WIF OF BATHES PROLOGUE.

Experience, though non auctoritee
Were in this world, is right ynough for me
To speke of wo that is in mariage:
For, lordings, sin I twelf yere was of age,
(Thanked be God that is eterne on live)
Husbondes at chirche dore have I had five,
(If I so often might han wedded be)
And all were worthy men in hir degree.
But me was told, not longe time agon is,
That sithen Crist ne went never but onis
To wedding, in the Cane of Galilee,
That by that ilke ensample taught he me,
That I ne shulde wedded be but ones.
Lo, herke eke, which a sharpe word for the nones.
Beside a welle Jesu God and man
Spake in reprefe of the Samaritan:
Thou hast yhadde five husbonds, sayde he;
And thilke man, that now hath wedded thee,
Is not thyn husbond: thus said he certain,
What that he ment therby, I can not sain.

But that I aske, why that the fifthe man
Was non husbond to the Samaritan?
How many might she have in mariage?
Yet herd I never tellen in min age
Upon this noumbre diffinitioun;
Men may devine, and glosen up and doun.
But wel I wot, expresse withouten lie
God bad us for to wex and multiplie;
That gentil text can I wel understond.
Eke wel I wot, he sayd, that min husbond
Shuld leve fader and moder, and take to me;
But of no noumbre mention made he
Of bigamie or of octogamie;
Why shuld men than speke of it vilanie?
Lo here the wise king Dan Salomon,
I trow he hadde wives mo than on,
(As wolde God it leful were to me
To be refreshed half so oft as he)
Which a gift of God had he for alle his wives?
No man hath swiche, that in this world on live is.
God wot, this noble king, as to my witte,
The firste night had many a mery fitte
With eche of hem, so wel was him on live.
Blessed be God that I have wedded five,
Welcome the sixthe whan that ever he shall.
For sith I wol not kepe me chaste in all,

Whan min husbond is fro the world ygon,
Som cristen man shal wedden me anon.
For than the apostle saith, that I am fre
To wedde a'Goddes half wher it liketh me.
He saith, that to be wedded is no sinne;
Better is to be wedded than to brinne.
What rekketh me though folk say vilanie
Of shrewed Lamech, and his bigamie?
I wot wel Abraham was an holy man,
And Jacob eke, as fer as ever I can,
And eche of hem had wives mo than two,
And many another holy man also.
Wher can ye seen in any maner age
That highe God defended mariage
By expresse word? I pray you telleth me,
Or wher commanded he virginitee?
I wot as wel as ye, it is no drede,
The apostle, whan he spake of maidenhede,
He said, that precept therof had he non:
Men may conseille a woman to ben on,
But conseilling is no commandement;
He put it in our owen jugement.
For hadde God commanded maidenhede,
Than had he dampned wedding out of drede;
And certes, if ther were no sede ysowe,
Virginitee than wherof shuld it growe?

Poule dorste not commanden at the lest
A thing, of which his maister yaf non hest.
The dart is sette up for virginitee,
Catch who so may, who renneth best let see.
But this word is not take of every wight,
But ther as God wol yeve it of his might.
I wot wel that the apostle was a maid,
But natheles, though that he wrote and said,
He wold that every wight were swiche as he,
All n'is but conseil to virginitee.
And for to ben a wif he yaf me leve,
Of indulgence, so n'is it non repreve
To wedden me, if that my make die,
Withoute exception of bigamie;
All were it good no woman for to touche,
(He ment as in his bed or in his couche)
For peril is both fire and tow to assemble;
Ye know what this ensample may resemble.
This is all and som, he held virginitee
More parfit than wedding in freeltee:
(Freeltee clepe I, but if that he and she
Wold lede hir lives all in chastitee)
I graunt it wel, I have of non envie,
Who maidenhed preferre to bigamie;
It liketh hem to be clene in body and gost:
Of min estat I wol not maken bost.

For wel ye know, a lord in his houshold
Ne hath nat every vessell all of gold:
Som bén of tree; and don hir lord service.
God clepeth folk to him in sondry wise,
And everich hath of God a propre gift,
Som this, som that, as that him liketh shift.
Virginitee is gret perfection,
And continence eke with devotion:
But Crist, that of perfection is welle,
Ne bade not every wight he shuld go selle
All that he had, and yeve it to the poure,
And in swiche wise folow him and his lore:
He speke to hem that wold live parfitly,
And, lordings, (by your leve) that am nat I;
I wol bestow the flour of all myn age
In th' actes and the fruit of mariage.
Tell me also, to what conclusion
Were membres made of generation,
And of so parfit wise a wight ywrought?
Trusteth me wel, they were nat made for nought.
Glose who so wol, and say bothe up and doun,
That they were made for purgatioun
Of urine, and of other things smale,
And eke to know a female from a male:
And for non other cause? say ye no?
The experience wot wel it is not so.

So that the clerkes be not with me wroth,
I say this, that they maked ben for both,
This is to sayn, for office, and for ese
Of engendrure, ther we not God displese.
Why shuld men elles in hir bookes sette,
That man shal yelden to his wif hire dette?
Now wherwith shuld he make his payement,
If he ne used his sely instrument?
Than were they made upon a creature
To purge urine, and eke for engendrure.
But I say not that every wight is hold,
That hath swiche harneis as I to you told,
To gon and usen hem in engendrure;
Than shuld men take of chastitee no cure.
Crist was a maide, and shapen as a man,
And many a seint, sith that this world began,
Yet lived they ever in parfit chastitee.
I n'ill envie with no virginitee.
Let hem with bred of pured whete be fed,
And let us wives eten barly bred.
And yet with barly bred, Mark tellen can,
Our Lord Jesu refreshed many a man.
In swiche estat as God hath cleped us,
I wol persever, I n'am not precious,
In wif hode wol I use min instrument
As frely as my maker hath it sent.

If I be dangerous God yeve me sorwe, 5733
Min husbond shal it have both even and morwe,
Whan that him list come forth and pay his dette.
An husbond wol I have, I wol not lette,
Which shal be both my dettour and my thrall,
And have his tribulation withall
Upon his flesh, while that I am his wif.
I have the power during all my lif
Upon his propre body, and nat he: 5741
Right thus the apostle told it unto me,
And bad our husbonds for to love us wel;
All this sentence me liketh every del.
Up stert the pardoner, and that anon;
Now, dame, quod he, by God and by Seint John,
Ye ben a noble prechour in this cas.
I was about to wed a wif, alas!
What? shuld I bie it on my flesh so dere? 5749
Yet had I lever wed no wif to-yere.
Abide, quod she, my tale is not begonne.
Nay, thou shalt drinken of another tonne
Er that I go, shal savour worse than ale.
And whan that I have told thee forth my tale
Of tribulation in mariage,
Of which I am expert in all min age,
(This is to sayn myself hath ben the whippe)
Than maiest thou chesen wheder thou wolt sippe 5758

Of thilke tonne, that I shal abroche. 5759
Beware of it, er thou to neigh approche.
For I shal tell ensamples mo than ten :
Who so that n'ill beware by other men
By him shal other men corrected be :
Thise same wordes writeth Ptholomee,
Rede in his Almageste, and take it there.
  Dame, I wold pray you, if your will it were,
Sayde this pardoner, as ye began, 5767
Tell forth your tale, and spareth for no man,
And techeth us yonge men of your practike.
  Gladly, quod she, sin that it may you like.
But that I pray to all this compagnie,
If that I speke after my fantasie,
As taketh not a greefe of that I say,
For min entente is not but for to play.
  Now, sires, than wol I tell you forth my tale.
As ever mote I drinken win or ale 5776
I shal say soth, the husbondes that I had
As three of hem were good, and two were bad.
The three were goode men and riche and olde.
Unnethes mighten they the statute holde,
In which that they were bounden unto me.
Ye wot wel what I mene of this parde.
As God me helpe, I laugh whan that I thinke,
How pitously a-night I made hem swinke, 5784

But by my fay, I tolde of it no store;
They had me yeven hir lond and hir tresore,
Me neded not do lenger diligence
To win hir love, or don hem reverence.
They loved me so wel by God above,
That I ne tolde no deintee of hir love.
A wise woman wol besie hire ever in on
To geten hir love, ther as she hath non.
But sith I had hem holly in min hond,
And that they hadde yeven me all hir lond,
What shuld I taken kepe hem for to plese,
But it were for my profit, or min ese?
I set hem so a-werke by my fay,
That many a night they songen wala wa.
The bacon was not fet for hem, I trow,
That some men have in Essex at Donmow.
I governed hem so wel after my lawe,
That eche of hem ful blisful was and fawe
To bringen me gay thinges fro the feyre.
They were ful glade whan I spake hem fayre,
For God it wot, I chidde hem spitously.
Now herkeneth how I bare me proprely.
Ye wise wives, that can understond,
Thus shul ye speke, and bere hem wrong on hond,
For half so boldely can ther no man
Sweren and lien as a woman can.

(I say not this by wives that ben wise, 5811
But if it be whan they hem misavise.)
A wise wif if that she can hire good,
Shal beren hem on hond the cow is wood,
And taken witnesse of hire owen mayd
Of hir assent: but herkeneth how I sayd.
  Sire olde kaynard, is this thin aray?
Why is my neigheboures wif so gay?
She is honoured over al wher she goth, 5819
I sit at home, I have no thrifty cloth.
What dost thou at my neigheboures hous?
Is she so faire? art thou so amorous?
What rownest thou with our maide? *benedicite,*
Sire olde lechour, let thy japes be.
  And if I have a gossib, or a frend,
(Withouten gilt) thou chidest as a fend,
If that I walke or play unto his hous. 5827
  Thou comest home as dronken as a mous,
And prechest on thy benche with evil prefe:
Thou sayst to me, it is a gret meschiefe
To wed a poure woman, for costage;
And if that she be riche of high parage,
Than sayst thou, that it is a tourmentrie
To soffre hire pride and hire melancolie.
And if that she be faire, thou veray knave,
Thou sayst that every holour wol hire have. 5836

She may no while in chastitee abide,
That is assailled upon every side.
Thou sayst som folk desire us for richesse,
Som for our shape, and som for our fairnesse,
And som, for she can other sing or dance,
And som for gentillesse and daliance,
Som for hire hondes and hire armes smale:
Thus goth all to the devil by thy tale,
Thou sayst, men may not kepe a castel wal,
It may so long assailled be over al.
And if that she be foul, thou sayst, that she
Coveteth every man that she may see;
For as a spaniel, she wol on him lepe,
Til she may finden som man hire to chepe,
Ne non so grey goos goth ther in the lake,
(As sayst thou) that wol ben withoute a make,
And sayst, it is an hard thing for to welde
A thing, that no man wol his thankes helde.
Thus sayst thou, lorel, whan thou gost to bed,
And that no wise man nedeth for to wed,
Ne no man that entendeth unto heven.
With wild thonder dint, and firy leven,
Mote thy welked nekke be to-broke!
Thou sayst, that dropping houses, and eke smoke,
And chiding wives, maken men to flee
Out of hir owen hous; a, *benedicite*,

What aileth swiche an old man for to chide? 5863
Thou sayst, we wives wol our vices hide,
Til we be fast, and than we wol hem shewe.
Wel may that be a proverbe of a shrewe.
Thou sayst, that oxen, asses, hors, and houndes,
They ben assaied at diverse stoundes,
Basines, lavoures, or that men hem bie,
Spones, stooles, and all swiche husbondrie,
And so ben pottes, clothes, and aray, 5871
But folk of wives maken non assay,
Til they ben wedded, olde dotard shrewe!
And than, sayst thou, we wol our vices shewe.
Thou sayst, also, that it displeseth me,
But if that thou wolt preisen my beautee,
And but thou pore alway upon my face,
And clepe me faire dame in every place;
And but thou make a feste on thilke day 5879
That I was borne, and make me fresh and gay;
And but thou do my norice honour,
And to my chamberere within my bour,
And to my faders folk, and myn allies;
Thus sayst thou, olde barel ful of lies.
And, yet also, of our prentis Jankin,
For his crispe here, shining as gold so fin,
And for he squiereth me both up and doun,
Yet hast thou caught a false suspection: 5888

I wol him nat, though thou were ded to-morwe. 5889
  But tell me this, why hidest thou with sorwe
The keies of thy chest away fro me?
It is my good as wel as thin, parde.
What, wenest thou make an idiot of our dame?
Now by that Lord that cleped is Seint Jame,
Thou shalt nat bothe, though that thou were wood
Be maister of my body and of my good?
That on thou shalt forgo, maugre thin eyen. 5897
What helpeth it of me to enquere and spien?
I trow, thou woldest locke me in thy cheste.
Thou shuldest say, Fayr wif, go wher thee leste;
Take your disport; I wol nat leve no tales;
I know you for a trewe wife, Dame Ales!
  We love no man that taketh kepe or charge
Wher that we gon; we wol be at our large.
Of alle men yblessed mote he be 5905
The wise astrologien Dan Ptholemee,
That sayth this proverbe in his Almageste:
Of alle men his wisdom is higheste,
That rekketh not who hath the world in hond.
  By this proverbe thou shalt wel understond,
Have thou ynough, what thar thee rekke or care
How merily that other folkes fare?
For certes, olde dotard, by your leve,
Ye shullen have queint right ynough at eve, 5914

He is to gret a nigard that wol werne
A man to light a candel at his lanterne;
He shal have never the lesse light parde.
Have thou ynough, thee thar not plainen thee.
Thou sayst also, if that we make us gay
With clothing and with precious array,
That it is peril of our chastitee.
And yet with sorwe thou enforcest thee,
And sayst thise wordes in the apostles name;
In habit made with chastitee and shame
Ye women shul appareile you, (quod he)
And nat in tressed here, and gay perrie,
As perles, ne with gold, ne clothes riche.
After thy text, ne after thy rubriche
I wol not work as mochel as a gnat.
Thou sayst also, I walke out like a cat;
For who so wolde senge the cattes skin,
Than wol the cat wel dwellen in hire in;
And if the cattes skin be sleke and gay,
She wol nat dwellen in hous half a day,
But forth she wol, or any day be dawed,
To shew hire skin and gon a caterwawed.
This is to say, if I be gay, sir shrewe,
I wol renne out, my borel for to shewe.
Sire olde fool, what helpeth thee to spien?
Though thou pray Argus with his hundred eyen

To be my wardecorps, as he can best, 5941
In faith he shal not kepe me but me lest:
Yet coude I make his berd, so mote I the.
  Thou sayest eke, that ther ben thinges three,
Which thinges gretly troublen all this erthe,
And that no wight ne may endure the ferthe:
O lefe sire shrewe, Jesu short thy lif.
  Yet prechest, thou sayst, an hateful wif
Yrekened is for on of thise meschances. 5949
Be ther non other maner resemblances
That ye may liken your parables to,
But if a sely wif be on of tho?
  Thou likenest eke womans love to helle,
To barrein lond, ther water may not dwelle.
  Thou likenest it also to wilde fire;
The more it brenneth, the more it hath desire
To consume every thing, that brent wol be. 5957
  Thou sayest, right as wormes shende a tre,
Right so a wif destroieth hire husbond;
This knowen they that ben in wives hond.
  Lordings, right thus, as ye han understond,
Bare I stifly min old husbondes on hond,
That thus they saiden in hir dronkennesse;
And all was false, but as I toke witnesse
On Jankin, and upon my nece also.
O Lord, the peine I did hem, and the wo, 5966

Ful gilteles, by Goddes swete pine; 5967
For as an hors, I coude bite and whine;
I coude plain, and I was in the gilt,
Or elles oftentime I had ben spilt.
Who so first cometh to the mill, first grint;
I plained first, so was our werre ystint.
They were ful glad to excusen hem ful blive
Of thing, the which they never agilt hir live.
Of wenches wold I beren hem on hond, 5975
Whan that for sike unnethes might they stond,
Yet tikeled I his herte for that he
Wend that I had of him so gret chiertee:
I swore that all my walking out by night
Was for to espien wenches that he dight:
Under that colour had I many a mirth.
For all swiche wit is yeven us in our birth;
Deceite, weping, spinning, God hath yeven 5983
To women kindly, while that they may liven.
And thus of o thing I may avaunten me,
And th'ende I had the beter in eche degree,
By sleight or force, or by som maner thing,
As by continual murmur or grutching,
Namely a-bed, ther hadden they meschance,
Ther wold I chide, and don hem no plesance:
I wold no lenger in the bed abide,
If that I felt his arme over my side, 5992

Til he had made his raunson unto me, 5993
Than wold I soffre him do his nicetee.
And therfore every man this tale I tell,
Winne who so may, for all is for to sell:
With empty hond men may no haukes lure,
For winning wold I all his lust endure,
And maken me a feined appetit,
And yet in bacon had I never delit:
That maked me that ever I wold hem chide. 6001
For though the pope had sitten hem beside,
I wold not spare hem at hir owen bord,
For by my trouthe I quitte hem word for word.
As helpe me veray God omnipotent,
Tho I right now shuld make my testament,
I ne owe hem not a word, that it n'is quit,
I brought it so abouten by my wit,
That they must yeve it up, as for the best, 6009
Or elles had we never ben in rest.
For though he loked as a wood leon,
Yet shuld he faille of his conclusion.
  Than wold I say, now, goode lefe, take kepe.
How mekely loketh Wilkin oure shepe!
Come ner my spouse, and let me ba thy cheke.
Ye shulden be al patient and meke,
And han a swete spiced conscience,
Sith ye so preche of Jobes patience. 6018

Suffreth alway sin ye so wel can preche, 6019
And but ye do, certain we shal you teche
That it is faire to han a wif in pees.
On of us two moste bowen doutelees:
And, sith a man is more resonable
Than woman is, ye mosten ben suffrable.
What aileth you to grutchen thus and grone?
Is it for ye wold have my queint alone?
Why take it all: lo, have it every del. 6027
Peter, I shrew you but ye love it wel.
For if I wolde sell my *belle chose*,
I coude walke as freshe as is a rose,
But I wol kepe it for your owen toth.
Ye be to blame, by God, I say you soth.
Swiche maner wordes hadden we on hond.
Now wol I speken of my fourthe husbond.
My fourthe husbonde was a revellour, 6035
This is to sayn, he had a paramour,
And I was yonge and ful of ragerie,
Stibborne and strong, and joly as a pie.
Tho coude I dancen to an harpe smale,
And sing ywis as any nightingale,
Whan I had dronke a draught of swete wine.
Metellius, the foule cherle, the swine,
That with a staf beraft his wif hire lif
For she drank wine, though I had ben his wif, 6044

Ne shuld he not have daunted me fro drinke:
And after wine of Venus most I thinke.
For al so siker as cold engendreth hayl,
A likerous mouth most han a likerous tayl.
In woman vinolent is no defence,
This knowen lechours by experience.
But, lord Crist, whan that it remembreth me
Upon my youth, and on my jolitee,
It tikleth me about myn herte rote.
Unto this day it doth myn herte bote,
That I have had my world as in my time.
But age, alas! that all wol envenime,
Hath me beraft my beautee and my pith:
Let go, farewel, the devil go therwith.
The flour is gon, ther n'is no more to tell,
The bren, as I best may, now moste I sell.
But yet to be right mery wol I fond.
Now forth to tellen of my fourthe husbond.
I say, I had in herte gret despit,
That he of any other had delit;
But he was quit by God and by Seint Joce:
I made him of the same wood a croce,
Not of my body in no foule manere,
But certainly I made folk swiche chere,
That in his owen grese I made him frie
For anger, and for veray jalousie.

By God, in erth I was his purgatorie, 6071
For which I hope his soule be in glorie.
For, God it wote, he sate ful oft and songe,
Whan that his sho ful bitterly him wronge.
Ther was no wight, save God and he, that wiste
In many a wise how sore that I him twiste.
He died when I came fro Jerusalem,
And lith ygrave under the rode-beem :
All is his tombe not so curious 6079
As was the sepulcre of him Darius,
Which that Appelles wrought so sotelly.
It is but wast to bury hem preciously.
Let him farewel, God give his soule rest,
He is now in his grave and in his chest.
Now of my fifthe husbonde wol I telle :
God let his soule never come in helle.
And yet was he to me the moste shrew, 6087
That fele I on my ribbes all by rew,
And ever shal, unto min ending day.
But in our bed he was so fresh and gay,
And therwithall he coude so wel me glose,
Whan that he wolde han my *belle chose*,
That, though he had me bet on every bon,
He coude win agen my love anon.
I trow, I loved him the bet, for he
Was of his love so dangerous to me. 6096

We wimmen han, if that I shal not lie, 6097
In this matere a queinte fantasie.
Waite, what thing we may nat lightly have,
Therafter wol we cry all day and crave.
Forbede us thing, and that desiren we;
Prese on us fast, and thanne wol we flee.
With danger uttren we all our chaffare;
Gret prees at market maketh dere ware,
And to gret chepe is holden a litel prise; 6105
This knoweth every woman that is wise.
My fifthe husbonde, God his soule blesse,
Which that I toke for love and no richesse,
He somtime was a clerk of Oxenforde,
And had left scole, and went at home at borde
With my gossib, dwelling in oure toun:
God have hire soule, hire name was Alisoun.
She knew my herte and all my privetee, 6113
Bet than our parish preest, so mote I the.
To hire bewried I my conseil all;
For had my husbond pissed on a wall,
Or don a thing that shuld have cost his lif,
To hire, and to another worthy wif,
And to my nece, which that I loved wel,
I wold have told his conseil every del.
And so I did ful often, God it wote,
That made his face ful often red and hote 6122

For veray shame, and blamed himself, for he
Had told to me so gret a privetee.
  And so befell that ones in a Lent,
(So often times I to my gossib went,
For ever yet I loved to be gay,
And for to walke in March, April, and May
From hous to hous, to heren sondry tales)
That Jankin clerk, and my gossib dame Ales,
And I myself, into the feldes went.
Myn husbond was at London all that Lent;
I had the better leiser for to pleie,
And for to see, and eke for to be seie
Of lusty folk; what wist I wher my grace
Was shapen for to be, or in what place?
Therfore made I my visitations
To vigilies, and to processions,
To prechings eke, and to thise pilgrimages,
To playes of miracles, and mariages,
And wered upon my gay skarlet gites.
Thise wormes, ne thise mothes, ne thise mites
Upon my paraille frett hem never a del,
And wost thou why? for they were used wel.
  Now wol I tellen forth what happed me:
I say, that in the feldes walked we,
Till trewely we had swiche daliance
This clerk and I, that of my purveance

I spake to him, and said him how that he, 6149
If I were widewe, shulde wedden me.
For certainly, I say for no bobance,
Yet was I never without purveance
Of mariage, ne of other thinges eke:
I hold a mouses wit not worth a leke,
That hath but on hole for to sterten to,
And if that faille, than is all ydo.
  I bare him on hond he had enchanted me; 6157
(My dame taughte me that subtiltee)
And eke I sayd, I mette of him all night,
He wold han slain me, as I lay upright,
And all my bed was ful of veray blood;
But yet I hope that ye shuln do me good:
For blood betokeneth gold, as me was taught.
And al was false, I dremed of him right naught,
But as I folwed ay my dames lore, 6165
As wel of that as of other thinges more.
  But now, sire, let me see, what shall I sain?
A ha, by God I have my tale again.
Whan that my fourthe husbonde was on bere,
I wept algate and made a sory chere,
As wives moten, for it is the usage,
And with my coverchefe covered my visage;
But, for that I was purveyed of a make,
I wept but smal, and that I undertake. 6174

To chirche was myn husbond born a-morwe 6175
With neigheboures that for him maden sorewe,
And Jankin oure clerk was on of tho:
As helpe me God, whan that I saw him go
After the bere, me thought he had a paire
Of legges and of feet, so clene and faire,
That all my herte I yave unto his hold.
He was, I trow, a twenty winter old,
And I was fourty, if I shal say soth, 6183
But yet I had alway a coltes toth.
Gat-tothed I was, and that became me wele,
I had the print of Seinte Venus sele.
As helpe me God, I was a lusty on,
And faire, and riche, and yonge, and wel begon:
And trewely, as min husbondes tolden me,
I had the beste queint that mighte be.
For certes I am all venerian 6191
In feling, and my herte is marcian:
Venus me yave my lust and likerousnesse,
And Mars yave me my sturdy hardinesse.
Min ascendent was Taure, and Mars therinne:
Alas, alas, that ever love was sinne!
I folwed ay min inclination
By vertue of my constellation:
That made me that I coude nat withdraw
My chambre of Venus from a good felaw. 6200

Yet have I Martes merke upon my face, 6201
And also in another privee place.
For God so wisly be my salvation,
I loved never by no discretion,
But ever folwed min appetit,
All were he shorte, longe, blake, or white,
I toke no kepe, so that he liked me,
How poure he was, ne eke of what degree.
What shuld I saye? but at the monthes ende 6209
This joly clerk Jankin, that was so hende,
Hath wedded me with gret solempnitee,
And to him yave I all the lond and fee,
That ever was me yeven therbefore:
But afterward repented me ful sore,
He n'olde suffre nothing of my list.
By God he smote me ones with his fist,
For that I rent out of his book a lefe, 6217
That of the stroke myn ere wex al defe.
Stibborne I was, as is a leonesse,
And of my tonge a veray jangleresse,
And walke I wold, as I had don beforn,
Fro hous to hous, although he had it sworn:
For which he oftentimes wolde preche,
And me of olde Romaine gestes teche.
How he Sulpitius Gallus left his wif,
And hire forsoke for terme of all his lif, 6226

Not but for open-heded he hire say 6227
Loking out at his dore upon a day.
Another Romaine told he me by name,
That, for his wif was at a sommer game
Without his weting, he forsoke hire eke.
And than wold he upon his Bible seke
That ilke proverbe of Ecclesiaste,
Wher he commandeth, and forbedeth faste,
Man shal not suffer his wife go roule aboute. 6235
Than wold he say right thus withouten doute:
Who so that bildeth his hous all of salwes,
And pricketh his blind hors over the falwes,
And suffereth his wif to go seken halwes,
Is worthy to be honged on the galwes.
But all for nought, I sette not an hawe
Of his proverbes, ne of his olde sawe;
Ne I wold not of him corrected be. 6243
I hate hem that my vices tellen me,
And so do mo of us (God wote) than I.
This made him wood with me all utterly;
I n'olde not forbere him in no cas.
Now wol I say you soth by Seint Thomas,
Why that I rent out of his book a lefe,
For which he smote me, so that I was defe.
He had a book, that gladly night and day
For his disport he wolde it rede alway, 6252

He cleped it Valerie, and Theophrast, 6253
And with that book he lough alway ful fast.
And eke ther was a clerk somtime at Rome,
A cardinal, that highte Seint Jerome,
That made a book again Jovinian,
Which book was ther, and eke Tertullian,
Crisippus, Trotula, and Helowis,
That was abbesse not fer fro Paris;
And eke the paraboles of Salomon, 6261
Ovides art, and bourdes many on;
And alle thise were bonden in o volume.
And every night and day was his custume
(Whan he had leiser and vacation
From other worldly occupation)
To reden in this book of wikked wives.
He knew of hem mo legendes and mo lives,
Than ben of goode wives in the Bible. 6269
For trusteth wel, it is an impossible,
That any clerk wol speken good of wives,
(But if it be of holy seintes lives)
Ne of non other woman never the mo.
Who peinted the leon, telleth me, who?
By God, if wimmen hadden written stories,
As clerkes han, within hir oratories,
They wold have writ of men more wikkednesse,
Than all the merke of Adam may redresse. 6278

The children of Mercury and of Venus 6279
Ben in hir werking ful contrarious.
Mercury loveth wisdom and science,
And Venus loveth riot and dispence.
And for hir divers disposition,
Eche falleth in others exaltation.
As thus, God wote, Mercury is desolat
In Pisces, wher Venus is exaltat,
And Venus falleth wher Mercury is reised. 6287
Therfore no woman of no clerk is preised.
The clerk whan he is old, and may nought do
Of Venus werkes not worth his old sho,
Than siteth he doun, and writeth in his dotage,
That wimmen cannot kepe hir mariage.
But now to purpos, why I tolde thee,
That I was beten for a book parde.
  Upon a night Jankin, that was our sire, 6295
Red on his book, as he sate by the fire,
Of Eva first, that for hire wikkednesse
Was all mankinde brought to wretchednesse,
For which that Jesu Crist himself was slain,
That bought us with his herte blood again.
  Lo here expresse of wimmen may ye find,
That woman was the losse of all mankind.
  Tho redde he me how Sampson lost his heres
Sleping, his lemman kitte hem with hire sheres, 6304

Thurgh whiche treson lost he both his eyen.
  Tho redde he me, if that I shal not lien,
Of Hercules, and of his Deianire,
That caused him to set himself a-fire.
  Nothing forgat he the care and the wo,
That Socrates had with his wives two;
How Xantippa cast pisse upon his hed.
This sely man sat still, as he were ded,
He wiped his hed, no more dorst he sain,
But, er the thonder stint ther cometh rain.
  Of Pasiphae, that was the quene of Crete,
For shrewednesse him thought the tale swete.
Fie, speke no more (it is a grisely thing)
Of hire horrible lust and hire liking.
  Of Clitemnestra for hire lecherie
That falsely made hire husbond for to die,
He redde it with ful good devotion.
  He told me eke, for what occasion
Amphiorax at Thebes lost his lif:
My husbond had a legend of his wif
Eriphile, that for an ouche of gold
Hath prively unto the Grekes told,
Wher that hire husbond hidde him in a place,
For which he had at Thebes sory grace.
  Of Lima told he me, and of Lucie:
They bothe made hir husbondes for to die,

That on for love, that other was for hate. 6331
Lima hire husbond on an even late
Enpoysoned hath, for that she was his fo:
Lucia likerous loved hire husbond so,
That for he shuld alway upon hire thinke,
She yave him swiche a maner love-drinke,
That he was ded er it were by the morwe:
And thus algates husbondes hadden sorwe.
Than told he me, how on Latumeus 6339
Complained to his felaw Arius,
That in his gardin growed swiche a tree,
On which he said how that his wives three
Honged hemself for hertes despitous.
O leve brother, quod this Arius,
Yeve me a plant of thilke blessed tree,
And in my gardin planted shal it be.
Of later date of wives hath he redde, 6347
That som han slain hir husbonds in hir bedde,
And let hir lechour dight hem all the night,
While that the corps lay in the flore upright:
And som han driven nailes in hir brain,
While that they slepe, and thus they han hem slain:
Som han hem yeven poyson in hir drink:
He spake more harm than herte may bethinke.
And therwithall he knew of mo proverbes,
Than in this world ther growen gras or herbes. 6356

Bet is (quod he) thin habitation
Be with a leon, or a foule dragon,
Than with a woman using for to chide.
Bet is (quod he) high in the roof abide,
Than with an angry woman doun in the hous,
They ben so wikked and contrarious:
They haten, that hir husbonds loven ay.
He sayd, a woman cast hire shame away,
Whan she cast of hire smock; and forther mo,
A faire woman, but she be chast also,
Is like a gold ring in a sowes nose.
Who coude wene, or who coude suppose
The wo that in min herte was, and the pine?
And whan I saw he n'olde never fine
To reden on this cursed book all night,
Al sodenly three leves have I plight
Out of his book, right as he redde, and eke
I with my fist so toke him on the cheke,
That in oure fire he fell bakward adoun.
And he up sterte, as doth a wood leoun,
And with his fist he smote me on the hed,
That in the flore I lay as I were ded.
And whan he saw how stille that I lay,
He was agast, and wold have fled away,
Til at the last out of my swough I brayde.
O, hast thou slain me, false theef? I sayde,

And for my lond thus hast thou mordred me ? 6383
Er I be ded, yet wol I kissen thee.
And nere he came, and kneled faire adoun,
And sayde ; dere suster Alisoun,
As helpe me God I shal thee never smite :
That I have don it is thyself to wite,
Foryeve it me, and that I thee beseke.
And yet eftsones I hitte him on the cheke,
And sayde ; theef, thus much am I awreke. 6391
Now wol I die, I may no longer speke.
  But at the last, with mochel care and wo
We fell accorded by ourselven two :
He yaf me all the bridel in min hond
To han the governance of hous and lond,
And of his tonge, and of his hond also,
And made him brenne his book anon right tho.
  And whan that I had getten unto me 6399
By maistrie all the soverainetee,
And that he sayd, min owen trewe wif,
Do as thee list, the terme of all thy lif,
Kepe thin honour, and kepe eke min estat ;
After that day we never had debat.
God helpe me so, I was to him as kinde,
As any wif fro Denmark unto Inde,
And al so trewe, and so was he to me :
I pray to God that sit in majestee 6408

So blisse his soule, for his mercy dere.
Now wol I say my tale if ye wol here.
The frere lough whan he had herd all this :
Now dame, quod he, so have I joye and blis,
This is a long preamble of a tale.
And whan the Sompnour herd the frere gale,
Lo (quod this Sompnour) Goddes armes two,
A frere wol entermete him evermo :
Lo, goode men, a flie and eke a frere
Wol fall in every dish and eke matere.
What spekest thou of preambulatioun ?
What ? amble or trot ; or pees, or go sit doun :
Thou lettest our disport in this matere.
Ye, wolt thou so, Sire Sompnour ? quod the frere ;
Now by my faith I shal, er that I go,
Tell of a Sompnour swiche a tale or two,
That all the folk shal laughen in this place.
Now elles, frere, I wol beshrewe thy face,
(Quod this Sompnour) and I beshrewe me,
But if I telle tales two or three
Of freres, or I come to Sidenborne,
That I shal make thin herte for to morne :
For wel I wot thy patience is gone.
Our hoste cried, pees, and that anon ;
And sayde ; let the woman tell hire tale.
Ye fare as folk that dronken ben of ale.

Do, dame, tell forth your tale, and that is best. 6435
Al redy, sire, quod she, right as you lest,
If I have licence of this worthy frere.
Yes, dame, quod he, tell forth, and I wol here.

THE WIF OF BATHES TALE.

In olde dayes of the king Artour,
Of which that Bretons speken gret honour, 6440
All was this lond fulfilled of faerie;
The Elf quene, with hire joly compagnie
Danced ful oft in many a grene mede.
This was the old opinion as I rede;
I speke of many hundred yeres ago;
But now can no man see non elves mo,
For now the grete charitee and prayeres
Of limitoures and other holy freres, 6448
That serchen every land and every streme,
As thikke as motes in the sonne beme,
Blissing halles, chambres, kichenes, and boures,
Citees and burghes, castles highe and toures,
Thropes and bernes, shepenes and dairies,
This maketh that ther ben no faeries:
For ther as wont to walken was an elf,
Ther walketh now the limitour himself,
In undermeles and in morweninges, 6457

And sayth his Matines and his holy thinges, 6458
As he goth in his limitatioun.
Women may now go safely up and doun,
In every bush, and under every tree,
Ther is non other incubus but he,
And he ne will don hem no dishonour.
  And so befell it, that this king Artour
Had in his hous a lusty bacheler,
That on a day came riding fro river; 6466
And happed, that, alone as she was borne,
He saw a maiden walking him beforne,
Of which maid he anon, maugre hire hed,
By veray force beraft hire maidenhed:
For which oppression was swiche clamour,
And swiche pursuite unto the king Artour,
That damned was this knight for to be ded
By cours of lawe, and shuld have lost his hed, 6474
(Paraventure swiche was the statute tho)
But that the quene and other ladies mo
So longe praieden the king of grace,
Til he his lif him granted in the place,
And yaf him to the quene, all at hire will
To chese whether she wold him save or spill.
  The quene thanketh the king with al hire might;
And after this thus spake she to the knight,
Whan that she saw hire time upon a day. 6483

Thou standest yet (quod she) in swiche array, 6484
That of thy lif yet hast thou no seuretee;
I grant thee lif, if thou canst tellen me,
What thing is it that women most desiren:
Beware, and kepe thy nekke bone from yren.
And if thou const not tell it me anon,
Yet wol I yeve thee leve for to gon
A twelvemonth and a day, to seke and lere
An answer suffisant in this matere. 6492
And seuretee wol I have, or that thou pace,
Thy body for to yelden in this place.
Wo was the knight, and sorwefully he siketh;
But what? he may not don all as him liketh.
And at the last he chese him for to wende,
And come agen right at the yeres ende
With swiche answer, as God wold him purvay:
And taketh his leve, and wendeth forth his way.
He seketh every hous and every place, 6501
Wher as he hopeth for to finden grace,
To lernen what thing women loven moste:
But he ne coude ariven in no coste,
Wher as he mighte find in this matere
Two creatures according in fere.
Som saiden, women loven best richesse,
Som saiden honour, som saiden jolinesse,
Som riche array, som saiden lust a-bedde, 6509

And oft time to be widewe and to be wedde.
  Some saiden, that we ben in herte most esed
Whan that we ben yflatered and ypreised.
He goth ful nigh the soth, I wol not lie;
A man shal winne us best with flaterie;
And with attendance, and with besinesse
Ben we ylimed bothe more and lesse.
  And som men saiden, that we loven best
For to be free, and do right as us lest,
And that no man repreve us of our vice,
But say that we ben wise, and nothing nice.
For trewely ther n'is non of us all,
If any wight wol claw us on the gall,
That we n'ill kike, for that he saith us soth:
Assay, and he shal find it, that so doth.
For be we never so vicious withinne,
We wol be holden wise and clene of finne.
  And some saiden, that gret delit han we
For to be holden stable and eke secre,
And in o purpos stedfastly to dwell,
And not bewreyen thing that men us tell.
But that tale is not worth a rake-stele.
Parde we women connen nothing hele,
Witnesse on Mida; wol ye here the tale?
  Ovide, amonges other thinges smale,
Said, Mida had under his longe heres

Growing upon his hed two asses eres; 6536
The whiche vice he hid, as he beste might,
Ful subtilly from every mannes sight,
That, save his wif, ther wist of it no mo;
He loved hire most, and trusted hire also;
He praied hire, that to no creature
She n'olde tellen of his disfigure.
  She swore him, nay, for all the world to winne,
She nolde do that vilanie, ne sinne, 6544
To make hire husbond han so foule a name:
She n'olde not tell it for hire owen shame.
But natheles hire thoughte that she dide,
That she so longe shuld a conseil hide;
Hire thought it swal so sore aboute hire herte,
That nedely som word hire must asterte;
And sith she dorst nat telle it to no man,
Doun to a mareis faste by she ran, 6552
Til she came ther, hire herte was a-fire:
And as a bitore bumbleth in the mire,
She laid hire mouth unto the water doun.
Bewrey me not, thou water, with thy soun,
Quod she, to thee I tell it, and no mo.
Min husbond hath long asses eres two.
Now is min herte all hole, now is it out,
I might no lenger kepe it out of dout.
Here may ye see, though we a time abide, 6561

Yet out it moste, we can no conseil hide. 6562
The remenant of the tale, if ye wol here,
Redeth Ovide, and ther ye may it lere.
  This knight, of which my tale is specially,
Whan that he saw he might not come therby,
(This is to sayn, what women loven most)
Within his brest ful sorweful was his gost.
But home he goth, he mighte not sojourne,
The day was come, that homward must he turne.
And in his way, it happed him to ride 6571
In all his care, under a forest side,
Wheras he saw upon a dance go
Of ladies foure and twenty, and yet mo.
Toward this ilke dance he drow ful yerne,
In hope that he som wisdom shulde lerne;
But certainly, er he came fully there,
Yvanished was this dance, he n'iste not wher;
No creature saw he that bare lif, 6579
Save on the grene he saw sitting a wif,
A fouler wight ther may no man devise.
Againe this knight this olde wif gan arise,
And said; sire knight, here forth ne lith no way.
Tell me what that ye seken by your fay,
Paraventure it may the better be:
Thise olde folk con mochel thing, quod she.
  My leve mother, quod this knight, certain, 6587

I n'am but ded, but if that I can sain, 6588
What thing it is that women most desire:
Coude ye me wisse, I wold quite wel your hire.
Plight me thy trouthe here in myn hond, quod she,
The nexte thing that I requere of thee
Thou shalt it do, if it be in thy might,
And I wol tell it you or it be night.
Have here my trouthe, quod the knight, I graunte.
Thanne, quod she, I dare me wel avaunte, 6596
Thy lif is sauf, for I wol stond therby,
Upon my lif the quene wol say as I:
Let see, which is the proudest of hem alle,
That wereth on a kerchef or a calle,
That dare sayn nay of that I shal you teche.
Let us go forth withouten lenger speche.
Tho rowned she a pistel in his ere,
And bad him to be glad, and have no fere. 6604
Whan they ben comen to the court, this knight
Said, he had hold his day, as he had hight,
And redy was his answere, as he saide.
Ful many a noble wif, and many a maide,
And many a widewe, for that they ben wise,
(The quene hireself sitting as a justice)
Assembled ben, his answer for to here,
And afterward this knight was bode appere.
To every wight commanded was silence, 6613

And that the knight shuld tell in audience, 6614
What thing that worldly women loven best.
This knight ne stood not still, as doth a best,
But to this question anon answerd
With manly vois, that all the court it herd.
  My liege lady, generally, quod he,
Women desiren to han soverainetee,
As well over hir husbond as hir love,
And for to ben in maistrie him above. 6622
This is your most desire, though ye me kille,
Doth as you list, I am here at your wille.
  In all the court ne was ther wif ne maide,
Ne widewe, that contraried that he saide,
But said, he was worthy to han his lif.
  And with that word up stert this olde wif,
Which that the knight saw sitting on the grene.
Mercy, quod she, my soveraine lady quene, 6630
Er that your court depart, as doth me right,
I taughte this answer unto this knight,
For which he plighte me his trouthe there,
The firste thing I wold of him requere,
He wold it do, if it lay in his might.
Before this court than pray I thee, sire knight,
Quod she, that thou me take unto thy wif,
For wel thou wost, that I have kept thy lif:
If I say false, say nay upon thy fay. 6639

This knight answered, alas and wala wa!
I wot right wel that swiche was my behest.
For Goddes love as chese a new request:
Take all my good, and let my body go.
Nay than, quod she, I shrewe us bothe two.
For though that I be olde, foule, and pore,
I n'olde for all the metal ne the ore,
That under erthe is grave, or lith above,
But if thy wif I were and eke thy love.
My love? quod he, nay, my dampnation.
Alas! that any of my nation
Shuld ever so foule disparaged be.
But all for nought; the end is this, that he
Constrained was, he nedes must hire wed,
And taketh this olde wif, and goth to bed.
Now wolden som men sayn paraventure,
That for my negligence I do no cure
To tellen you the joye and all the array,
That at the feste was that ilke day.
To which thing shortly answeren I shal:
I say ther was no joye ne feste at al,
Ther n'as but hevinesse and mochel sorwe:
For prively he wedded hire on the morwe,
And all day after hid him as an oule,
So wo was him, his wif loked so foule.
Gret was the wo the knight had in his thought

Whan he was with his wif a-bed ybrought, 6666
He walweth, and he turneth to and fro.
  This olde wif lay smiling evermo,
And said: O dere husbond, *benedicite*,
Fareth every knight thus with his wif as ye?
Is this the lawe of king Artoures hous?
Is every knight of his thus dangerous?
I am your owen love, and eke your wif,
I am she, which that saved hath your lif, 6674
And certes yet did I you never unright.
Why fare ye thus with me this firste night?
Ye faren like a man had lost his wit.
What is my gilt? for Goddes love tell it,
And it shal ben amended, if I may.
  Amended? quod this knight, alas! nay, nay,
It wol not ben amended never mo;
Thou art so lothly, and so olde also, 6682
And therto comen of so low a kind,
That litel wonder is though I walwe and wind;
So wolde God, min herte wolde brest.
  Is this, quod she, the cause of your unrest?
  Ye certainly, quod he, no wonder is.
  Now sire, quod she, I coude amend all this,
If that me list, er it were dayes three,
So wel ye mighten bere you unto me.
  But for ye speken of swiche gentillesse, 6691

As is descended out of old richesse, 6692
That therfore shullen ye be gentilmen;
Swiche arrogance n'is not worth an hen.
  Loke who that is most vertuous alway,
Prive and apert, and most entendeth ay
To do the gentil dedes that he can,
And take him for the gretest gentilman.
Crist wol we claime of him our gentillesse,
Not of our elders for hir old richesse. 6700
For though they yeve us all hir heritage,
For which we claime to ben of high parage,
Yet may they not bequethen, for no thing,
To non of us, hir vertuous living,
That made hem gentilmen called to be,
And bade us folwen hem in swiche degree.
  Wel can the wise poet of Florence,
That highte Dant, speken of this sentence: 6708
Lo, in swiche maner rime is Dantes tale.
  Ful selde up riseth by his branches smale
Prowesse of man, for God of his goodnesse
Wol that we claime of him our gentillesse:
For of our elders may we nothing claime
But temporel thing, that man may hurt and maime.
  Eke every wight wot this as wel as I,
If gentillesse were planted naturelly
Unto a certain linage doun the line, 6717

Prive and apert, than wold they never fine
To don of gentillesse the faire office,
They mighten do no vilanie or vice.
  Take fire and bere it into the derkest hous
Betwix this and the mount of Caucasus,
And let men shette the dores, and go thenne,
Yet wol the fire as faire lie and brenne
As twenty thousand men might it behold;
His office naturel ay wol it hold,
Up peril of my lif, til that it die.
  Here may ye see wel, how that genterie
Is not annexed to possession,
Sith folk ne don hir operation
Alway, as doth the fire, lo, in his kind.
For God it wot, men moun ful often find
A lordes sone do shame and vilanie.
And he that wol han pris of his genterie,
For he was boren of a gentil hous,
And had his elders noble and vertuous,
And n'ill himselven do no gentil dedes,
Ne folwe his gentil auncestriè, that ded is,
He n'is not gentil, be he duk or erl;
For vilains sinful dedes make a cherl.
For gentillesse n'is but the renomee
Of thin auncestres, for hir high bountee,
Which is a strange thing to thy persone:

Thy gentillesse cometh fro God alone. 6744
Than cometh our veray gentillesse of grace,
It was no thing bequethed us with our place.
  Thinketh how noble, as saith Valerius,
Was thilke Tullius Hostilius,
That out of poverte rose to high noblesse.
Redeth Senek, and redeth eke Boece,
Ther shull ye seen expresse, that it no dred is,
That he is gentil that doth gentil dedis. 6752
And therfore, leve husbond, I thus conclude,
Al be it that min auncestres weren rude,
Yet may the highe God, and so hope I,
Granten me grace to liven vertuously:
Than am I gentil, whan that I beginne
To liven vertuously, and weiven sinne.
  And ther as ye of poverte me repreve,
The highe God, on whom that we beleve, 6760
In wilful poverte chese to lede his lif:
And certes, every man, maiden, or wif
May understond, that Jesus heven king
Ne wold not chese a vicious living.
  Glad poverte is an honest thing certain,
This wol Senek and other clerkes sain.
Who so that halt him paid of his poverte,
I hold him rich, al had he not a sherte.
He that coveiteth is a poure wight, 6769

For he wold han that is not in his might. 6770
But he that nought hath, ne coveiteth to have,
Is riche, although ye hold him but a knave.
Veray poverte is sinne proprely.
  Juvenal saith of poverte merily:
The poure man whan he goth by the way,
Beforn the theves he may sing and play.
Poverte is hateful good; and, as I gesse,
A ful gret bringer out of besinesse; 6778
A gret amender eke of sapience
To him, that taketh it in patience.
Poverte is this, although it seme elenge,
Possession that no wight wol challenge.
Poverte ful often, whan a man is low,
Maketh his God and eke himself to know:
Poverte a spectakel is, as thinketh me,
Thurgh which he may his veray frendes see. 6786
And therfore, sire, sin that I you not greve,
Of my poverte no more me repreve.
  Now, sire, of elde, that ye repreven me:
And certes, sire, though non auctoritee
Were in no book, ye gentiles of honour
Sain, that men shuld an olde wight honour,
And clepe him fader, for your gentillesse;
And auctours shal I finden, as I gesse.
  Now ther ye sain that I am foule and old, 6795

Than drede ye not to ben a cokewold.
For filthe, and elde also, so mote I the,
Ben grete wardeins upon chastitee.
But natheles, sin I know your delit,
I shal fulfill your worldly appetit.
Chese now (quod she) on of thise thinges twey,
To han me foule and old til that I dey,
And be to you a trewe humble wif,
And never you displese in all my lif:
Or elles wol ye han me yonge and faire,
And take your aventure of the repaire,
That shal be to your hous because of me,
Or in som other place it may wel be?
Now chese yourselven whether that you liketh.
This knight aviseth him, and sore siketh,
But at the last he said in this manere;
My lady and my love, and wif so dere,
I put me in your wise governance,
Cheseth yourself which may be most plesance
And most honour to you and me also,
I do no force the whether of the two:
For as you liketh, it sufficeth me.
Than have I got the maisterie, quod she,
Sin I may chese and governe as me lest.
Ye certes, wif, quod he, I hold it best.
Kisse me, quod she, we be no lenger wrothe,

For by my trouth I wol be to you bothe, 6822
This is to sayn, ye bothe faire and good.
I pray to God that I mote sterven wood,
But I to you be al so good and trewe,
As ever was wif, sin that the world was newe;
And but I be to-morwe as faire to seen,
As any lady, emperice, or quene,
That is betwix the Est and eke the West,
Doth with my lif and deth right as you lest. 6830
Cast up the curtein, loke how that it is.
  And whan the knight saw veraily all this,
That she so faire was, and so yonge therto,
For joye he hent hire in his armes two:
His herte bathed in a bath of blisse,
A thousand time a-row he gan hire kisse:
And she obeyed him in every thing,
That mighte don him plesance or liking. 6838
And thus they live unto hir lives ende
In parfit joye, and Jesu Crist us sende
Husbondes meke and yonge, and fressh a-bed,
And grace to overlive hem that we wed.
  And eke I pray Jesus to short hir lives,
That wol not be governed by hir wives.
And old and angry nigards of dispence,
God send hem sone a veray pestilence. 6846

THE FRERES PROLOGUE.

This worthy limitour, this noble Frere, 6847
He made alway a maner louring chere
Upon the Sompnour, but for honestee
No vilains word as yet to him spake he:
But at the last he said unto the wif;
Dame, (quod he) God yeve you right good lif,
Ye have here touched, all so mote I the, 6853
In scole matere a ful gret difficultee.
Ye han said mochel thing right wel, I say:
But, dame, here as we riden by the way,
Us nedeth not to speken but of game,
And let auctoritees in Goddes name
To preching, and to scole eke of clergie.
But if it like unto this compagnie, 6860
I wol you of a Sompnour tell a game;
Parde ye may wel knowen by the name,
That of a Sompnour may no good be said;
I pray that non of you be evil apaid:
A Sompnour is a renner up and doun
With mandements for fornicatioun,
And is ybete at every tounes ende.
Tho spake our hoste; A, sire, ye shuld ben hende
And curteis, as a man of your estat, 6869

In compagnie we wiln have no debat: 6870
Telleth your tale, and let the Sompnour be.
Nay, quod the Sompnour, let him say by me
What so him list; whan it cometh to my lot,
By God I shal him quiten every grot.
I shall him tellen which a gret honour
It is to be a flatering limitour,
And eke of many another maner crime,
Which nedeth not rehersen at this time, 6878
And his office I shal him tell ywis.
Our hoste answered; pees, no more of this.
And afterward he said unto the Frere,
Tell forth your tale, min owen maister dere.

THE FRERES TALE.

Whilom ther was dwelling in my contree 6883
An archedeken, a man of high degree,
That boldely did execution
In punishing of fornication,
Of witchecraft, and eke of bauderie,
Of defamation, and avouterie,
Of chirche-reves, and of testaments,
Of contracts, and of lack of sacraments,
Of usure, and of simonie also;
But certes lechours did he gretest wo, 6892

They shulden singen, if that they were hent;
And smale titheres weren foule yshent,
If any persone wold upon hem plaine,
Ther might astert hem no pecunial peine.
For smale tithes, and smale offering,
He made the peple pitously to sing;
For er the bishop hent hem with his crook
They weren in the archedekens book;
Than had he thurgh his jurisdiction
Power to don on hem correction.
He had a Sompnour redy to his hond,
A slier boy was non in Englelond;
For subtilly he had his espiaille,
That taught him wel wher it might ought availle.
He coude spare of lechours on or two,
To techen him to foure and twenty mo.
For though this Sompnour wood be as an hare,
To tel his harlotrie I wol not spare,
For we ben out of hir correction,
They han of us no jurisdiction,
Ne never shul have, terme of all hir lives.
Peter, so ben the women of the stives
Quod this Sompnour, yput out of our cure,
Pees, with mischance and with misaventure,
Our hoste said, and let him tell his tale.
Now telleth forth, and let the Sompnour gale,

Ne spareth not, min owen maister dere. 6919
  This false theef, this Sompnour quod the frere,
Had alway baudes redy to his hond,
As any hauke to lure in Englelond,
That told him all the secree that they knewe,
For hir acquaintance was not come of newe;
They weren his approvers prively.
He tooke himself a gret profit therby,
His maister knew not alway what he wan. 6927
Withouten mandement, a lewed man
He coude sompne, up peine of Cristes curse,
And they were inly glad to fille his purse,
And maken him gret festes at the nale.
And right as Judas hadde purses smale
And was a theef, right swiche a theef was he,
His master hadde but half his duetee.
He was (if I shal yeven him his laud) 6935
A theef, and eke a Sompnour, and a baud.
  He had eke wenches at his retenue,
That whether that sire Robert or sire Hue,
Or Jakke, or Rauf, or who so that it were
That lay by hem, they told it in his ere.
Thus was the wenche and he of on assent.
And he wold fecche a feined mandement,
And sompne hem to the chapitre bothe two,
And pill the man, and let the wenche go. 6944

Than wold he say; frend, I shal for thy sake 6945
Do strike thee out of oure lettres blake;
Thee thar no more as in this cas travaille;
I am thy frend ther I may thee availle.
Certain he knew of briboures many mo,
Than possible is to tell in yeres two:
For in this world n'is dogge for the bowe,
That can an hurt dere from an hole yknowe,
Bet than this Sompnour knew a slie lechour, 6953
Or an avoutrer, or a paramour:
And for that was the fruit of all his rent,
Therfore on it he set all his entent.
And so befell, that ones on a day
This Sompnour, waiting ever on his pray,
Rode forth to sompne a widewe, and old ribibe,
Feining a cause, for he wold han a bribe.
And happed that he saw beforn him ride 6961
A gay yeman under a forest side:
A bow he bare, and arwes bright and kene,
He had upon a courtepy of grene,
An hat upon his hed with frenges blake.
Sire, quod this Sompnour, haile, and wel atake.
Welcome, quod he, and every good felaw;
Whider ridest thou under this grene shaw?
(Saide this yeman) wolt thou fer to-day?
This Sompnour him answerd, and saide, nay. 6970

Here faste by (quod he) is min entent 6971
To riden, for to reisen up a rent,
That longeth to my lordes duetee.
  A, art thou than a baillif? Ye, quod he.
(He dorste not for veray filth and shame
Say that he was a Sompnour, for the name).
  De par dieux, quod this yeman, leve brother,
Thou art a baillif, and I am another.
I am unknowen, as in this contree. 6979
Of thin acquaintance I wol prayen thee,
And eke of brotherhed, if that thee list.
I have gold and silver lying in my chist;
If that thee hap to come in to our shire,
Al shal be thin, right as thou wolt desire.
  Grand mercy, quod this Sompnour, by my faith.
Everich in others hond his trouthe laith,
For to be sworne brethren til they dey. 6987
In daliaunce they riden forth and pley.
  This Sompnour, which that was as ful of jangles,
As ful of venime ben thise wariangles,
And ever enquering upon every thing,
Brother, quod he, wher is now your dwelling,
Another day if that I shuld you seche?
  This yeman him answerd in softe speche;
Brother, quod he, fer in the North contree,
Wheras I hope somtime I shal thee see. 6996

Or we depart I shal thee so wel wisse,
That of min hous ne shalt thou never misse.
Now brother, quod this Sompnour, I you pray,
Teche me, while that we riden by the way,
(Sith that ye ben a baillif as am I)
Som subtiltee, and tell me faithfully
In min office how I may moste winne.
And spareth not for conscience or for sinne,
But, as my brother, tell me how do ye.
Now by my trouthe, brother min, said he,
As I shal tellen thee a faithful tale.
My wages ben ful streit and eke ful smale;
My lord is hard to me and dangerous,
And min office is ful laborious;
And therfore by extortion I leve,
Forsoth I take all that men wol me yeve.
Algates by sleighte or by violence
Fro yere to yere I win all my dispence;
I can no better tellen faithfully.
Now certes, (quod this Sompnour) so fare I;
I spare not to taken, God it wote,
But if it be to hevy or to hote.
What I may gete in conseil prively,
No maner conscience of that have I.
N'ere min extortion, I might not liven,
Ne of swiche japes wol I not be shriven.

Stomak ne conscience know I non; 7023
I shrew thise shrifte faders everich on.
Wel be we met by God and by Seint Jame.
But leve brother, tell me than thy name,
Quod this Sompnour. Right in this mene while
This yeman gan a litel for to smile.
Brother, quod he, wolt thou that I thee tell?
I am a fend, my dwelling is in hell,
And here I ride about my pourchasing, 7031
To wote wher men wol give me any thing.
My pourchas is th'effect of all my rent.
Loke how thou ridest for the same entent
To winnen good, thou rekkest never how,
Right so fare I, for riden wol I now
Unto the worldes ende for a praye.
A, quod this Sompnour, *benedicite*, what say ye?
I wend ye were a yeman trewely. 7039
Ye have a mannes shape as wel as I.
Have ye than a figure determinat
In helle, ther ye ben in your estat?
Nay certainly, quod he, ther have we non,
But whan us liketh we can take us on,
Or elles make you wene that we ben shape
Somtime like a man, or like an ape;
Or like an angel can I ride or go;
It is no wonder thing though it be so, 7048

A lousy jogelour can deceiven thee, 7049
And parde yet can I more craft than he.
Why, quod the Sompnour, ride ye than or gon
In sondry shape, and not alway in on ?
For we, quod he, wol us swiche forme make,
As most is able our preye for to take.
What maketh you to han al this labour ?
Ful many a cause, leve sire Sompnour,
Saide this fend. But alle thing hath time ; 7057
The day is short, and it is passed prime,
And yet ne wan I nothing in this day ;
I wol entend to winning, if I may,
And not entend our thinges to declare :
For, brother min, thy wit is al to bare
To understand, although I told hem thee.
But for thou axest, why labouren we :
For somtime we be Goddes instruments, 7065
And menes to don his commandements,
Whan that him list, upon his creatures,
In divers actes and in divers figures :
Withouten him we have no might certain,
If that him list to stonden theragain.
And som time at our praiere han we leve,
Only the body, and not the soule to greve :
Witnesse on Job, whom that we diden wo.
And somtime han we might on bothe two, 7074

This is to sain, on soule and body eke.
And somtime be we suffered for to seke
Upon a man, and don his soule unreste
And not his body, and all is for the beste.
Whan he withstandeth our temptation,
It is a cause of his salvation,
Al be it that it was not our entente
He shuld be sauf, but that we wold him hente.
And somtime be we servants unto man,
As to the archebishop Seint Dunstan,
And to the apostle servant eke was I.
  Yet tell me, quod this Sompnour, faithfully,
Make ye you newe bodies thus alway
Of elements? the fend answered, nay:
Sometime we feine, and somtime we arise
With ded bodies, in ful sondry wise,
And speke as renably, and faire, and wel,
As to the Phitonesse did Samuel:
And yet wol som men say it was not he.
I do no force of your divinitee.
But o thing warne I thee, I wol not jape,
Thou wolt algates wete how we be shape:
Thou shalt hereafterward, my brother dere,
Come, wher thee nedeth not of me to lere,
For thou shalt by thin owen experience
Conne in a chaiere rede of this sentence,

Bet than Virgile, while he was on live, 7101
Or Dant also. Now let us riden blive,
For I wol holden compagnie with thee,
Til it be so that thou forsake me.
Nay, quod this Sompnour, that shal never betide.
I am a yeman knowen is ful wide;
My trouthe wol I hold, as in this cas.
For though thou were the devil Sathanas,
My trouthe wol I hold to thee, my brother, 7109
As I have sworne, and eche of us to other,
For to be trewe brethren in this cas,
And bothe we gon abouten our pourchas.
Take thou thy part, what that men wol thee yeve,
And I shal min, thus may we bothe leve.
And if that any of us have more than other,
Let him be trewe, and part it with his brother.
I graunte, quod the devil, by my fay. 7117
And with that word they riden forth hir way,
And right at entring of the tounes ende,
To which this Sompnour shope him for to wende,
They saw a cart, that charged was with hay,
Which that a carter drove forth on his way.
Depe was the way, for which the carte stood:
The carter smote, and cried as he were wood,
Heit scot, heit brok, what spare ye for the stones?
The fend (quod he) you fecche body and bones, 7126

As ferforthly as ever ye were foled, 7127
So mochel wo as I have with you tholed.
The devil have al, bothe hors, and cart, and hay.
  The Sompnour sayde, here shal we have a pray;
And nere the fend he drow, as nought ne were,
Ful prively, and rouned in his ere:
Herken my brother, herken, by thy faith,
Herest thou not, how that the carter saith?
Hent it anon, for he hath yeve it thee, 7135
Both hay and cart, and eke his caples three.
  Nay, quod the devil, God wot, never a del,
It is not his entente, trust thou me wel,
Axe him thyself, if thou not trowest me,
Or elles stint a while and thou shalt see.
  This carter thakketh his hors upon the croupe,
And they begonne to drawen and to stoupe.
Heit now, quod he, ther Jesu Crist you blesse, 7143
And all his hondes werk, bothe more and lesse:
That was wel twight, min owen liard boy,
I pray God save thy body and Seint Eloy.
Now is my cart out of the slough parde.
  Lo, brother, quod the fend, what told I thee?
Here may ye seen, min owen dere brother,
The cherl spake o thing, but he thought another.
Let us go forth abouten our viage;
Here win I nothing upon this cariage. 7152

Whan that they comen somwhat out of toun, 7153
This Sompnour to his brother gan to roune;
Brother, quod he, here woneth an old rebekke,
That had almost as lefe to lese hire nekke,
As for to yeve a peny of hire good.
I wol have twelf pens though that she be wood,
Or I wol somone hire to our office;
And yet, God wot, of hire know I no vice.
But for thou canst not, as in this contree, 7161
Winnen thy cost, take here ensample of me.
This Sompnour clappeth at the widewes gate;
Come out, he sayd, thou olde very trate;
I trow thou hast som frere or preest with thee.
Who clappeth? said this wif, *benedicite,*
God save you, sire, what is your swete will?
I have, quod he, of somons here a bill.
Up peine of cursing, loke that thou be 7169
To-morwe before the archedekenes knee,
To answere to the court, of certain thinges.
Now lord, quod she, Crist Jesu, king of kinges,
So wisly helpe me, as I ne may.
I have ben sike, and that ful many a day.
I may not go so fer (quod she) ne ride,
But I be ded, so priketh it in my side.
May I not axe a libel, sire Sompnour,
And answere ther by my procuratour 7178

To swiche thing as men wold apposen me? 7179
  Yes, quod this Sompnour, pay anon, let see,
Twelf pens to me, and I wol thee acquite.
I shal no profit han therby but lite:
My maister hath the profit and not I.
Come of, and let me riden hastily;
Yeve me twelf pens, I may no lenger tarie.
  Twelf pens, quod she, now lady Seinte Marie
So wisly helpe me out of care and sinne, 7187
This wide world though that I shuld it winne,
Ne have I not twelf pens within my hold.
Ye knowen wel that I am poure and old;
Kithe your almesse upon me poure wretche.
  Nay than, quod he, the foule fend me fetche,
If I thee excuse, though thou shuldest be spilt.
  Alas! quod she, God wot, I have no gilt.
  Pay me, quod he, or by the swete Seinte Anne
As I wol bere away thy newe panne 7196
For dette, which thou owest me of old,
Whan that thou madest thyn husbond cokewold,
I paied at home for thy correction.
  Thou liest, quod she, by my salvation,
Ne was I never or now, widew ne wif,
Sompned unto your court in all my lif;
Ne never I n'as but of my body trewe.
Unto the devil rough and blake of hewe 7204

Yeve I thy body and my panne also. 7205
And whan the devil herd hire cursen so
Upon hire knees, he sayd in this manere;
Now, Mabily, min owen moder dere,
Is this your will in ernest that ye sey?
The devil, quod she, so fetche him or he dey,
And panne and all, but he wol him repent.
Nay, olde stot, that is not min entent,
Quod this Sompnour, for to repenten me 7213
For any thing that I have had of thee;
I wold I had thy smok and every cloth.
Now brother, quod the devil, be not wroth;
Thy body and this panne ben min by right.
Thou shalt with me to helle yet to-night,
Wher thou shalt knowen of our privetee
More than a maister of divinitee.
And with that word the foule fend him hent. 7221
Body and soule, he with the devil went,
Wher as thise Sompnours han hir heritage;
And God that maked after his image
Mankinde, save and gide us all and some,
And lene this Sompnour good man to become.
Lordings, I coude have told you (quod this frere)
Had I had leiser for this Sompnour here,
After the text of Crist, and Poule, and John,
And of oure other doctours many on, 7230

Swiche peines, that your hertes might agrise,
Al be it so, that no tonge may devise,
Though that I might a thousand winter tell,
The peines of thilke cursed hous of hell.
But for to kepe us fro that cursed place,
Waketh, and prayeth Jesu of his grace,
So kepe us fro the temptour Sathanas.
Herkneth this word, beware as in this cas.
The leon sit in his awaite alway
To sle the innocent, if that he may.
Disposeth ay your hertes to withstond
The fend, that you wold maken thral and bond;
He may not tempten you over your might,
For Crist wol be your champion and your knight;
And prayeth, that this Sompnour him repent
Of his misdedes, or that the fend him hent.

THE SOMPNOURES PROLOGUE.

This Sompnour in his stirope high he stood,
Upon this Frere his herte was so wood,
That like an aspen leef he quoke for ire:
Lordings, quod he, but o thing I desire,
I you beseche, that of your curtesie,
Sin ye han herd this false Frere lie,
As suffereth me I may my tale telle.

This Frere bosteth that he knoweth helle, 7254
And, God it wot, that is but litel wonder,
Freres and fendes ben but litel asonder.
For parde, ye han often time herd telle,
How that a Frere ravished was to helle
In spirit ones by a visioun,
And as an angel lad him up and doun,
To shewen him the peines that ther were:
In all the place saw he not a Frere, 7262
Of other folk he saw ynow in wo.
Unto this angel spake the Frere tho;
Now, sire, quod he, han Freres swiche a grace,
That non of hem shal comen in this place?
Yes, quod this angel, many a millioun:
And unto Sathanas, he lad him doun.
(And now hath Sathanas, saith he, a tayl
Broder than of a carrike is the sayl) 7270
Hold up thy tayl, thou Sathanas, quod he,
Shew forth thin ers, and let the Frere see
Wher is the nest of Freres in this place.
And er than half a furlong way of space,
Right so as bees out swarmen of an hive,
Out of the devils ers ther gonnen drive
A twenty thousand Freres on a route.
And thurghout hell they swarmed al aboute,
And com agen, as fast as they may gon, 7279

And in his ers they crepen everich on:
He clapt his tayl agen, and lay ful still.
This Frere, whan he loked had his fill
Upon the turments of this sory place,
His spirit God restored of his grace
Into his body agen, and he awoke;
But natheles for fere yet he quoke,
So was the devils ers ay in his mind,
That is his heritage of veray kind.
God save you alle, save this cursed frere;
My prologue wol I end in this manere.

THE SOMPNOURES TALE.

Lordings, ther is in Yorkshire, as I gesse,
A mersh contree ycalled Holdernesse,
In which ther went a limitour aboute
To preche, and eke to beg, it is no doubte.
And so befell that on a day this frere
Had preched at a chirche in his manere,
And specially aboven every thing
Excited he the peple in his preching
To trentals, and to yeve for Goddes sake,
Wherwith men mighten holy houses make,
Ther as divine service is honoured,
Not ther as it is wasted and devoured,

Ne ther it nedeth not for to be yeven,
As to possessioners, that mowen leven
(Thanked be God) in wele and abundance.
Trentals, sayd he, deliveren fro penance
Hir frendes soules, as wel olde as yonge,
Ye, whan that they ben hastily ysonge,
Not for to hold a preest jolif and gay,
He singeth not but o masse on a day.
Delivereth out (quod he) anon the soules.
Ful hard it is, with fleshhook or with oules
To ben yclawed, or to bren or bake:
Now spede you hastily for Cristes sake.
And whan this frere had said all his entent,
With *qui cum patre* forth his way he went.
Whan folk in chirche had yeve him what hem lest
He went his way, no lenger wold he rest,
With scrippe and tipped staf, ytucked hie:
In every hous he gan to pore and prie,
And begged mele and chese, or elles corn.
His felaw had a staf tipped with horn,
A pair of tables all of ivory,
And a pointel ypolished fetisly,
And wrote alway the names, as he stood,
Of alle folk that yave hem any good,
Askaunce that he wolde for hem preye.
Yeve us a bushel whete, or malt, or reye,

A Goddes kichel, or a trippe of chese,
Or elles what you list, we may not chese;
A Goddes halfpeny, or a masse peny;
Or yeve us of your braun, if ye have any,
A dagon of your blanket, leve dame,
Our suster dere, (lo here I write your name)
Bacon or beef, or swiche thing as ye find.
  A sturdy harlot went hem ay behiud,
That was hir hostes man, and bare a sakke,
And what men yave hem, laid it on his bakke.
And whan that he was out at dore, anon
He planed away the names everich on,
That he before had written in his tables:
He served hem with nifles and with fables. [frere.
  Nay, ther thou liest, thou Sompnour, quod the
Pees, quod our hoste, for Cristes moder dere,
Tell forth thy tale, and spare it not all.
  So thrive I, quod this Sompnour, so I shall.
  So long he went fro hous to hous, till he
Came to an hous, ther he was wont to be
Refreshed more than in a hundred places.
Sike lay the husbond man, whos that the place is,
Bedred upon a couche low he lay:
Deus hic, quod he, O Thomas frend, good day,
Sayde this frere all curtisly and soft.
Thomas, quod he, God yelde it you, ful oft

Have I upon this benche faren ful wele, 7355
Here have I eten many a mery mele.
And fro the benche he drove away the cat,
And laied adoun his potent and his hat,
And eke his scrip, and set himself adoun:
His felaw was ywalked into toun
Forth with his knave, into that hostelrie,
Wher as he shope him thilke night to lie.
O dere maister, quod this sike man, 7363
How have ye faren sin that March began,
I saw you not this fourtene night and more
God wot, quod he, laboured have I ful sore,
And specially for thy salvation
Have I sayd many a precious orison,
And for our other frendes, God hem blesse.
I have this day ben at your chirche at messe,
And said a sermon to my simple wit, 7371
Not all after the text of holy writ,
For it is hard to you, as I suppose,
And therefore wol I teche you ay the glose.
Glosing is a ful glorious thing certain,
For letter sleth, so as we clerkes sain.
Ther have I taught hem to be charitable,
And spend hir good ther it is resonable.
And ther I saw our dame, a, wher is she?
Yonder I trow that in the yard she be, 7380

Sayde this man, and she wol come anon.
Ey maister, welcome be ye by Seint John,
Sayde this wif, how fare ye hertily?
This frere ariseth up ful curtisly,
And hire embraceth in his armes narwe,
And kisseth hire swete, and chirketh as a sparwe
With his lippes: dame, quod he, right wel,
As he that is your servant every del.
Thanked be God, that you yaf soule and lif,
Yet saw I not this day so faire a wif
In all the chirche, God so save me.
Ye, God amende defautes, sire, quod she,
Algates welcome be ye, by my fay.
Grand mercy, dame, that have I found alway.
But of your grete goodnesse, by your leve,
I wolde pray you that ye not you greve,
I wol with Thomas speke a litel throw:
Thise curates ben so negligent and slow
To gropen tendrely a conscience.
In shrift, in preching is my diligence
And study, in Peters wordes and in Poules,
I walke and fishe Cristen mennes soules,
To yeld our Lord Jesu his propre rent;
To sprede his worde is sette all min entent.
Now by your faith, o dere sire, quod she,
Chideth him wel for Seinte Charitee.

He is ay angry as is a pissemire,
Though that he have all that he can desire,
Though I him wrie a-night, and make him warm,
And over him lay my leg and eke min arm,
He groneth as our bore, lith in our stie:
Other disport of him right non have I,
I may not plese him in no maner cas.
O Thomas, *jeo vous die*, Thomas, Thomas,
This maketh the fend, this muste ben amended.
Ire is a thing that high God hath defended,
And therof wol I speke a word or two.
Now, maister, quod the wif, er that I go,
What wol ye dine? I wol go theraboute.
Now, dame, quod he, *jeo vous die sanz doute*,
Have I nat of a capon but the liver,
And of your white bred nat but a shiver,
And after that a rosted pigges hed,
(But I ne wolde for me no beest were ded)
Than had I with you homly suffisance.
I am a man of litel sustenance.
My spirit hath his fostring in the Bible.
My body is ay so redy and so penible
To waken, that my stomak is destroied.
I pray you, dame, that ye be nought annoied,
Though I so frendly you my conseil shewe;
By God I n'old have told it but a fewe.

Now, sire, quod she, but o word er I go. 7433
My child is ded within thise wekes two,
Sone after that ye went out of this toun.
His deth saw I by revelatioun,
Sayde this frere, at home in our dortour.
I dare wel sain, that er than half an hour
After his deth, I saw him borne to blisse
In min avision, so God me wisse.
So did our sextein, and our fermerere, 7441
That han ben trewe freres fifty yere:
They may now, God be thanked of his lone,
Maken hir jubilee, and walke alone.
And up I arose, and all our covent eke,
With many a tere trilling on our cheke,
Withouten noise or clatering of belles,
Te deum was our song, and nothing elles,
Save that to Crist I bade an orison, 7449
Thanking him of my revelation.
For, sire and dame, trusteth me right wel,
Our orisons ben more effectuel,
And more we seen of Cristes secree thinges,
Than borel folk, although that they be kinges.
We live in poverte, and in abstinence,
And borel folk in richesse and dispence
Of mete and drinke, and in hir foule delit.
We han this worldes lust all in despit. 7458

Lazar and Dives liveden diversely, 7459
And divers guerdon hadden they therby.
Who so wol pray, he must fast and be clene,
And fat his soule, and make his body lene.
We fare, as sayth the apostle; cloth and food
Sufficeth us, though they be not ful good.
The clenenesse and the fasting of us freres,
Maketh that Crist accepteth our praieres.
Lo, Moises forty daies and forty night 7467
Fasted, er that the high God ful of might
Spake with him in the mountagne of Sinay:
With empty wombe of fasting many a day,
Received he the lawe, that was writen
With Goddes finger; and Eli, wel ye witen,
In mount Oreb, er he had any speche
With highe God, that is our lives leche,
He fasted long, and was in contemplance. 7475
Aaron, that had the temple in governance,
And eke the other preestes everich on,
Into the temple whan they shulden gon
To praien for the peple, and do servise,
They n'olden drinken in no maner wise
No drinke, which that might hem dronken make,
But ther in abstinence pray and wake,
Lest that they deiden: take heed what I say—
But they be sobre that for the peple pray— 7484

Ware that I say—no more; for it sufficeth,
Our Lord Jesu, as holy writ deviseth,
Yave us ensample of fasting and praieres:
Therfore we mendiants, we sely freres,
Ben wedded to poverte and continence,
To charitee, humblesse, and abstinence,
To persecution for rightwisnesse,
To weping, misericorde, and to clenenesse,
And therfore may ye see that our praieres
(I speke of us, we mendiants, we freres)
Ben to the highe God more acceptable
Than youres, with your festes at your table.
  Fro Paradis first, if I shal not lie,
Was man out chased for his glotonie,
And chast was man in Paradis certain.
But herken now, Thomas, what I shal sain,
I have no text of it, as I suppose,
But I shal find it in a maner glose;
That specially our swete Lord Jesus
Spake this by freres, whan he sayde thus,
Blessed be they that poure in spirit ben.
And so forth all the gospel may ye sen,
Whether it be liker our profession,
Or hirs that swimmen in possession.
Fie on hir pompe, and on hir glotonie,
And on hir lewednesse: I hem defie.

Me thinketh they ben like Jovinian, 7511
Fat as a whale, and walken as a swan;
Al vinolent as botel in the spence;
Hir praier is of ful gret reverence;
Whan they for soules say the Psalm of Davit,
Lo, buf they say, *Cor meum eructavit.*
  Who foloweth Cristes gospel and his lore
But we, that humble ben, and chast, and pore,
Workers of Goddes word, not auditours? 7519
Therfore right as an hauke upon a sours
Up springeth into the aire, right so praieres
Of charitable and chast besy freres,
Maken hir sours to Goddes eres two.
Thomas, Thomas, so mote I ride or go,
And by that lord that cleped is Seint Ive,
N'ere thou our broder, shuldest thou not thrive.
In our chapitre pray we day and night 7527
To Crist, that he thee sende hele and might
Thy body for to welden hastily.
  God wot, quod he, nothing therof fele I,
As help me Crist, as I in fewe yeres
Have spended upon divers maner freres
Ful many a pound, yet fare I never the bet;
Certain my good have I almost beset:
Farewel my good, for it is al ago.
  The frere answered, O Thomas, dost thou so? 7536

What nedeth you diverse freres to seche?
What nedeth him that hath a parfit leche,
To sechen other leches in the toun?
Your inconstance is your confusion.
Hold ye than me, or elles our covent,
To pray for you ben insufficient?
Thomas, that jape n'is not worth a mite;
Your maladie is for we han to lite.
A, yeve that covent half a quarter otes;
And yeve that covent four and twenty grotes;
And yeve that frere a peny, and let him go:
Nay, nay, Thomas, it may no thing be so.
What is a ferthing worth parted on twelve?
Lo, eche thing that is oned in himselve
Is more strong than whan it is yscatered.
Thomas, of me thou shalt not ben yflatered,
Thou woldest han our labour al for nought.
The highe God, that all this world hath wrought,
Saith, that the workman worthy is his hire.
Thomas, nought of your tresor I desire
As for myself, but that all our covent
To pray for you is ay so diligent:
And for to bilden Cristes owen chirche.
Thomas, if ye wol lernen for to wirche,
Of bilding up of chirches may ye finde
If it be good, in Thomas lif of Inde.

Ye liggen here ful of anger and of ire,
With which the devil set your herte on fire,
And chiden here this holy innocent
Your wif, that is so good and patient.
And therfore trow me, Thomas, if thee lest,
Ne strive not with thy wif, as for the best.
And bere this word away now by thy faith,
Touching swiche thing, lo, what the wise saith :
Within thy hous ne be thou no leon;
To thy suggets do non oppression;
Ne make thou not thin acquaintance to flee.
And yet, Thomas, eftsones charge I thee,
Beware from ire that in thy bosom slepeth,
Ware fro the serpent, that so slily crepeth
Under the gras, and stingeth subtilly.
Beware, my sone, and herken patiently,
That twenty thousand men han lost hir lives
For striving with hir lemmans and hir wives.
Now sith ye han so holy and meek a wif,
What nedeth you Thomas, to maken strif?
Ther n'is ywis no serpent so cruel,
Whan man tredeth on his tail, ne half so fel,
As woman is, whan she hath caught an ire;
Veray vengeance is than all hire desire.
Ire is a sinne, on of the grete seven,
Abhominable unto the God of heven,

And to himself it is destruction. 7589
This every lewed vicar and person
Can say, how ire engendreth homicide;
Ire is in soth executour of pride.
  I coud of ire say so mochel sorwe,
My tale shulde lasten til to-morwe.
And therfore pray I God both day and night,
An irous man God send him litel might.
It is gret harm, and certes gret pitee 7597
To sette an irous man in high degree.
  Whilom ther was an irous potestat,
As saith Senek, that during his estat
Upon a day out riden knightes two.
And, as fortune wold that it were so,
That on of hem came home, that other nought.
Anon the knight before the juge is brought,
That saide thus; thou hast thy felaw slain, 7605
For which I deme thee to the deth certain.
And to another knight commanded he;
Go, lede him to the deth, I charge thee.
And happed, as they wenten by the wey
Toward the place ther as he shulde dey,
The knight came, which men wenden had be ded.
Than thoughten they it was the beste rede
To lede hem bothe to the juge again.
They saiden, lord, the knight ne hath not slain 7614

His felaw, here he stondeth hol alive. 7615
Ye shull be ded, quod he, so mot I thrive,
That is to say, both on, and two, and three.
And to the firste knight right thus spake he.
I damned thee, thou must algate be ded:
And thou also must nedes lese thyn hed,
For thou art cause why thy felaw deyeth.
And to the thridde knight right thus he seyeth,
Thou hast not don that I commanded thee. 7623
And thus he did do slen hem alle three.
Irous Cambises was eke dronkelew,
And ay delighted him to ben a shrew.
And so befell, a lord of his meinie,
Tha loved vertuous moralitee,
Sayd on a day betwix hem two right thus:
A lord is lost, if he be vicious;
And dronkennesse is eke a foule record 7631
Of any man, and namely of a lord.
Ther is ful many an eye and many an ere
Awaiting on a lord, and he n'ot wher.
For Goddes love drinke more attemprely:
Win maketh man to lesen wretchedly
His mind, and eke his limmes everich on.
The revers shalt thou see, quod he, anon,
And preve it by thyn owen experience,
That win ne doth to folk no swiche offence. 7640

Ther is no win bereveth me my might 7641
Of hond, ne foot, ne of min eyen sight.
And for despit he dranke mochel more
An hundred part than he had don before,
And right anon, this cursed irous wretche
This knightes sone let before him fetche,
Commanding him he shuld before him stond:
And sodenly he took his bow in hond,
And up the streng he pulled to his ere, 7649
And with an arwe he slow the child right ther.
Now whether have I a siker hond or non?
Quod he, Is all my might and minde agon?
Hath win bereved me min eyen sight?
What shuld I tell the answer of the knight?
His son was slain, ther is no more to say.
Beth ware therfore with lordes for to play,
Singeth *Placebo*, and I shal if I can, 7657
But if it be unto a poure man:
To a poure man men shuld his vices telle,
But not to a lord, though he shuld go to helle.
Lo, irous Cirus, thilke Persien,
How he destroyed the river of Gisen,
For that an hors of his was dreint therin,
Whan that he wente Babilon to win:
He made that the river was so smal,
That wimmen might it waden over al. 7666

Lo, what said he, that so wel techen can?
Ne be no felaw to non irous man,
Ne with no wood man walke by the way,
Lest thee repent; I wol no forther say.
  Now, Thomas, leve brother, leve thin ire,
Thou shalt me find as just, as is a squire;
Hold not the devils knif ay to thin herte,
Thin anger doth thee all to sore smerte,
But shew to me all thy confession.
  Nay, quod the sike man, by Seint Simon
I have ben shriven this day of my curat;
I have him told al holly min estat.
Nedeth no mo to speke of it, sayth he,
But if me list of min humilitee.
  Yeve me than of thy gold to make our cloistre,
Quod he, for many a muscle and many an oistre,
Whan other men han ben ful wel at ese,
Hath been our food, our cloistre for to rese:
And yet, God wot, unneth the fundament
Parfourmed is, ne of our pavement
N'is not a tile yet within our wones:
By God we owen fourty pound for stones.
Now help, Thomas, for him that harwed helle,
For elles mote we oure bokes selle,
And if ye lacke oure predication,
Than goth this world all to destruction.

For who so fro this world wold us bereve, 7693
So God me save, Thomas, by your leve,
He wold bereve out of this world the sonne.
For who can teche and worken as we conne?
And that is not of litel time, (quod he)
But sithen Elie was, and Elisee,
Han freres ben, that find I of record,
In charitee, ythonked be our Lord.
Now, Thomas, help for Seinte Charitee. 7701
  And doun anon he sette him on his knee.
  This sike man woxe wel neigh wood for ire,
He wolde that the frere had ben a-fire
With his false dissimulation.
  Swiche thing as is in my possession,
Quod he, that may I yeve you and non other:
Ye sain me thus, how that I am your brother.
Ye certes, quod this frere, ye, trusteth wel; 7709
I took our dame the letter of our sele.
  Now wel, quod he, and somewhat shal I yeve
Unto your holy covent while I live;
And in thin hond thou shalt it have anon,
On this condition, and other non,
That thou depart it so, my dere brother,
That every frere have as moche as other:
This shalt thou swere on thy profession
Withouten fraud or cavilation. 7718

I swere it, quod the frere, upon my faith.
And therwithall his hond in his he layth;
Lo here my faith, in me shal be no lak.
Than put thin hond adoun right by my bak,
aide this man, and grope wel behind,
Benethe my buttok, ther thou shalte find
A thing, that I have hid in privetee.
A, thought this frere, that shal go with me.
And doun his hond he launcheth to the clifte,
In hope for to finden ther a gifte.
And whan this sike man felte this frere
About his towel gropen ther and here,
Amid his hond he let the frere a fart;
Ther n'is no capel drawing in a cart,
That might han let a fart of swiche a soun.
The frere up sterte, as doth a wood leoun:
A, false cherl, quod he, for Goddes bones,
This hast thou in despit don for the nones:
Thou shalt abie this fart, if that I may.
His meinie, which that herden this affray,
Came leping in, and chased out the frere,
And forth he goth with a ful angry chere,
And fet his felaw, ther as lay his store:
He loked as it were a wilde bore,
And grinte with his teeth, so was he wroth.
A sturdy pas doun to the court he goth,

Wher as ther woned a man of gret honour, 7745
To whom that he was alway confessour:
This worthy man was lord of that village.
This frere came, as he were in a rage,
Wher as this lord sat eting at his bord:
Unnethes might the frere speke o word,
Til atte last he saide, God you see,
  This lord gan loke, and saide, *Benedicite!*
What? frere John, what maner world is this? 7753
I see wel that som thing ther is amis;
Ye loken as the wood were ful of theves.
Sit doun anon, and tell me what your greve is,
And it shal ben amended, if I may.
  I have, quod he, had a despit to day,
God yelde you, adoun in your village,
That in this world ther ni's so poure a page,
That he n'olde have abhominatioun 7761
Of that I have received in youre toun:
And yet ne greveth me nothing so sore,
As that the olde cherl, with lokkes hore,
Blasphemed hath oure holy covent eke.
  Now, maister, quod this lord, I you beseke.
  No maister, sire, quod he, but servitour,
Though I have had in scole that honour.
God liketh not, that men us Rabi call,
Neither in market, ne in your large hall. 7770

No force, quod he, but tell me all your grefe. 7771
Sire, quod this Frere, an odious meschefe
This day betid is to min ordre, and me,
And so *per consequens* to eche degree
Of holy chirche, God amende it sone.
Sire, quod the lord, ye wot what is to don:
Distempre you not, ye ben my confessour.
Ye ben the salt of the erthe, and the savour;
For Goddes love your patience now hold; 7779
Telle me your grefe. And he anon him told
As ye han herd before, ye wot wel what.
The lady of the hous ay stille sat.
Til she had herde what the Frere said.
Ey, goddes moder, quod she, blisful maid,
Is ther ought elles? tell me faithfully.
Madame, quod he, how thinketh you therby?
How that me thinketh? quod she, so God me spede,
I say, a cherle hath don a cherles dede. 7788
What shuld I say? God let him never the;
His sike hed is ful of vanitee;
I hold him in a maner frenesie.
Madame, quod he, by God I shal not lie,
But I in other wise may ben awreke,
I shal diffame him over all, ther I speke;
This false blasphemour, that charged me
To parten that wol not departed be, 7796

To every man ylike, with meschance.
The lord sat stille, as he were in a trance,
And in his herte he rolled up and doun,
How had this cherl imaginatioun
To shewen swiche a probleme to the frere.
Never erst or now ne herd I swiche matere;
I trow the Devil put it in his mind.
In all Arsmetrike shal ther no man find
Beforn this day of swiche a question.
Who shulde make a demonstration,
That every man shuld han ylike his part
As of a soun or savour of a fart?
O nice proude cherl, I shrewe his face.
Lo, sires, quod the lord, with harde grace,
Who ever herd of swiche a thing or now?
To every man ylike? tell me how.
It is an impossible, it may not be.
Ey, nice cherl, God let him never the.
The rombling of a fart, and every soun,
N'is but of aire reverberatioun,
And ever it wasteth lite and lite away;
Ther n'is no man can demen, by my fay,
If that it were departed equally.
What? lo my cherl, lo yet how shrewedly
Unto my confessour to-day he spake;
I hold him certain a demoniake.

Now ete your mete, and let the cherl go play,
Let him go honge himself a devil way.
Now stood the lordes squier atte bord,
That carf his mete, and herde word by word
Of all this thing, of which I have you sayd.
My lord, quod he, be ye not evil apaid,
I coude telle for a goune-cloth
To you, sire frere, so that ye be not wroth,
How that this fart shuld even ydeled be
Amonge your covent, if it liked thee.
Tell, quod the lord, and thou shalt have anon
A goune-cloth, by God and by seint John.
My lord, quod he, whan that the weder is faire,
Withouten winde, or pertourbing of aire,
Let bring a cart-whele here into this hall,
But loke that it have his spokes all;
Twelf spokes hath a cart-whele communly;
And bring me than twelf freres, wete ye why?
For threttene is a covent as I gesse:
Your confessour here for his worthinesse
Shal parfourme up the noumbre of his covent.
Than shull they knele adoun by on assent,
And to every spokes end in this manere
Ful sadly lay his nose shal a frere;
Your noble confessour, ther God him save,
Shal hold his nose upright under the nave.

Than shal this cherl, with bely stif and tought 7849
As any tabour, hider ben ybrought;
And set him on the whele right of this cart
Upon the nave, and make him let a fart,
And ye shull seen, up peril of my lif,
By veray preef that is demonstratif,
That equally the soun of it wol wende,
And eke the stinke, unto the spokes ende,
Save that this worthy man, your confessour, 7857
(Because he is a man of gret honour)
Shal han the firste fruit, as reson is.
The noble usage of freres yet it is,
The worthy men of hem shul first be served:
And certainly he hath it wel deserved;
He hath to-day taught us so mochel good,
With preching in the pulpit ther he stood,
That I may vouchesauf, I say for me, 7865
He hadde the first smelle of fartes three,
And so wold all his brethren hardely,
He bereth him so faire and holyly.
The lord, the lady, and eche man, save the frere
Sayden, that Jankin spake in this matere
As wel as Euclide, or elles Ptholomee.
Touching the cherl, they sayden, subtiltee
And highe wit made him speken as he spake;
He n'is no fool, ne no demoniake. 7874

And Jankin hath ywonne a new goune;
My tale is don, we ben almost at toune.

THE CLERKES PROLOGUE.

Sire Clerk of Oxenforde, our hoste said,
Ye ride as stille and coy, as doth a maid,
Were newe spoused, sitting at the bord:
This day ne herd I of your tonge a word.
I trow ye studie abouten som sophime:
But Salomon saith, that every thing hath time.
For Goddes sake as beth of better chere,
It is no time for to studien here.
Tell us som mery tale by your fay;
For what man that is entred in a play,
He nedes most unto the play assent.
But precheth not, as freres don in Lent,
To make us for our old sinnes wepe,
Ne that thy tale make us not to slepe.
Tell us som mery thing of aventures,
Your terms, your coloures, and your figures,
Kepe hem in store, til so be ye endite
Hie stile, as whan that men to kinges write.
Speketh so plain at this time, I you pray,
That we may understonden what ye say.
This worthy Clerk benignely answerde;

Hoste, quod he, I am under your yerde, 7898
Ye have of us as now the governance,
And therfore wolde I do you obeysance,
As fer as reson asketh hardely:
I wol you tell a tale, which that I
Lerned at Padowe, of a worthy clerk,
As preved by his wordes and his werk.
He is now ded, and nailed in his cheste,
I pray to God so yeve his soule reste. 7906
  Fraunceis Petrark, the laureat poete,
Highte this clerk, whos rethorike swete
Enlumined all Itaille of poetrie,
As Lynyan did of philosophie,
Or law, or other art particulere:
But deth, that wol not suffre us dwellen here,
But as it were a twinkling of an eye,
Hem both hath slaine, and alle we shul dye. 7914
  But forth to tellen of this worthy man,
That taughte me this tale, as I began,
I say that first he with hie stile enditeth
(Or he the body of his tale writeth)
A proheme, in the which descriveth he
Piemont, and of Saluces the contree,
And speketh of Apennin the hilles hie,
That ben the boundes of west Lumbardie:
And of mount Vesulus in special, 7923

Wher as the Poo out of a welle smal
Taketh his firste springing and his sours,
That estward ay encreseth in his cours
To Emelie ward, to Ferare, and Venise,
The which a longe thing were to devise.
And trewely as to my jugement,
Me thinketh it a thing impertinent,
Save that he wol conveyen his matere:
But this is the tale which that ye mow here.

THE CLERKES TALE.

Ther is right at the West side of Itaille
Doun at the rote of Vesulus the cold,
A lusty plain, habundant of vitaille,
Ther many a toun and tour thou maist behold,
That founded were in time of fathers old,
And many another delitable sighte,
And Saluces this noble contree highte.

A markis whilom lord was of that lond,
As were his worthy elders him before,
And obeysant, ay redy to his hond,
Were all his lieges, bothe lesse and more:
Thus in delit he liveth, and hath don yore.

Beloved and drad, thurgh favour of fortune, 7945
Both of his lordes, and of his commune.

Therwith he was, to speken of linage,
The gentilest yborne of Lumbardie,
A faire person, and strong, and yong of age,
And ful of honour and of curtesie:
Discret ynough, his contree for to gie,
Sauf in som thinges that he was to blame, 7952
And Walter was this yonge lordes name.

I blame him thus, that he considered nought
In time coming what might him betide,
But on his lust present was all his thought,
And for to hauke and hunt on every side:
Wel neigh all other cures let he slide,
And eke he n'old (and that was worst of all) 7959
Wedden no wif for ought that might befall.

Only that point his peple bare so sore,
That flockmel on a day to him they went,
And on of hem, that wisest was of lore,
(Or elles that the lord wold best assent
That he shuld tell him what the peple ment,
Or elles coud he wel shew swiche matere)
He to the markis said as ye shull here. 7967

O noble markis, your humanitee
Assureth us and yeveth us hardinesse,
As oft as time is of necessitee,
That we to you mow tell our hevinesse:
Accepteth, lord, than of your gentillesse,
That we with pitous herte unto you plaine,
And let your eres nat my vois disdaine.

Al have I not to don in this matere
More than another man hath in this place,
Yet for as moch as ye, my lord so dere,
Han alway shewed me favour and grace,
I dare the better aske of you a space
Of audience, to shewen our request,
And ye, my lord, to don right as you lest.

For certes, lord, so wel us liketh you
And all your werke, and ever have don, that we
Ne couden not ourself devisen how
We mighten live in more felicitee:
Save o thing, lord, if it your wille be,
That for to be a wedded man you lest,
Than were your peple in soverain hertes rest.

Boweth your nekke under the blisful yok
Of soveraintee, and not of servise,

Which that men clepen spousaile or wedlok:
And thinketh, lord, among your thoughtes wise,
How that our days passe in sondry wise;
For though we slepe, or wake, or rome, or ride,
Ay fleth the time, it wol no man abide.

And though your grene youthe floure as yet,
In crepeth age alway as still as ston,
And deth manaseth every age, and smit
In eche estat, for ther escapeth non:
And al so certain, as we knowe eche on
That we shul die, as uncertain we all
Ben of that day whan deth shal on us fall.

Accepteth then of us the trewe entent,
That never yet refuseden your hest,
And we wol, lord, if that ye wol assent,
Chese you a wife in short time at the mest,
Borne of the gentillest and of the best
Of all this lond, so that it oughte seme
Honour to God and you, as we can deme.

Deliver us out of all this besy drede,
And take a wif, for highe Goddes sake:
For if it so befell, as God forbede,
That thurgh your deth your linage shulde slake
And that a strange successour shuld take

Your heritage, o! wo were us on live: 8015
Wherfore we pray you hastily to wive.

Hir meke praiere and hir pitous chere
Made the markis for to han pitee.
Ye wol, quod he, min owen peple dere,
To that I never er thought constrainen me.
I me rejoyced of my libertee,
Than selden time is found in mariage; 8022
Ther I was free, I moste ben in servage.

But natheles I see your trewe entent,
And trust upon your wit, and have don ay:
Wherfore of my free will I wol assent
To wedden me, as sone as ever I may.
But ther as ye han profred me to-day
To chesen me a wif, I you relese 8029
That chois, and pray you of that profer cese.

For God it wot, that children often ben
Unlike hir worthy eldres hem before,
Bountee cometh al of God, not of the stren,
Of which they ben ygendered and ybore:
I trust in Goddes bountee, and therfore
My mariage, and min estat, and rest
I him betake, he may don as him lest. 8037

Let me alone in chesing of my wif,
That charge upon my bak I wol endure:
But I you pray, and charge upon your lif,
That what wif that I take, ye me assure
To worship hire while that hire lif may dure,
In word and werk both here and elles where,
As she an emperoures doughter were.

And forthermore this shuln ye swere, that ye
Again my chois shul never grutch ne strive.
For sith I shal forgo my libertee
At your request, as ever mote I thrive,
Ther as min herte is set, ther wol I wive:
And but ye wol assent in swiche manere,
I pray you speke no more of this matere.

With hertly will they sworen and assenten
To all this thing, ther saide not o wight nay:
Beseching him of grace, or that they wenten,
That he wold granten hem a certain day
Of his spousaile, as sone as ever he may,
For yet alway the peple somwhat dred,
Lest that this markis wolde no wif wed.

He granted hem a day, swiche as him lest,
On which he wold be wedded sikerly,

And said he did all this at hir request; 8061
And they with humble herte ful buxumly
Kneling upon hir knees ful reverently
Him thonken all, and thus they han an end
Of hir entente, and home agen they wend.

And hereupon he to his officeres
Commandeth for the feste to purvay.
And to his privee knightes and squieres 8068
Swiche charge he yave, as him list on hem lay:
And they to his commandement obey,
And eche of hem doth al his diligence
To do unto the feste al reverence.

Pars secunda.

Nought fer fro thilke paleis honourable, 8073
Wher as this markis shope his mariage,
Ther stood a thorpe, of sighte delitable,
In which that poure folk of that village
Hadden hir bestes and hir herbergage,
And of hir labour toke hir sustenance,
After that the erthe yave hem habundance.

Among this poure folk ther dwelt a man,
Which that was holden pourest of hem all: 8081

But highe God somtime senden can 8082
His grace unto a litel oxes stall:
Janicola men of that thorpe him call.
A doughter had he, faire ynough to sight,
And Grisildis this yonge maiden highth.

But for to speke of vertuous beautee,
Than was she on the fairest under sonne:
Ful pourely yfostred up was she: 8089
No likerous lust was in hire herte yronne:
Wel ofter of the well than of the tonne
She dranke, and for she wolde vertue plese,
She knew wel labour, but non idel ese.

But though this mayden tendre were of age,
Yet in the brest of hire virginitee
Ther was enclosed sad and ripe corage: 8096
And in gret reverence and charitee
Hire old poure fader fostred she:
A few sheep spinning on the feld she kept,
She wolde not ben idel til she slept.

And whan she homward came, she wolde bring
Wortes and other herbes times oft,
The which she shred and sethe for hire living,
And made hire bed ful hard, and nothing soft:
And ay she kept hire fadres lif on loft 8105

With every obeisance and diligence, 8106
That child may don to fadres reverence.

Upon Grisilde, this poure creature,
Ful often sithe this markis sette his eye,
As he on hunting rode paraventure:
And whan it fell that he might hire espie,
He not with wanton loking of folie
His eyen cast on hire, but in sad wise 8113
Upon hire chere he wold him oft avise,

Commending in his herte hire womanhede,
And eke hire vertue, passing any wight
Of so yong age, as wel in chere as dede.
For though the peple have no gret insight
In vertue, he considered ful right
Hire bountee, and disposed that he wold 8120
Wedde hire only, if ever he wedden shold.

The day of wedding came, but no wight can
Tellen what woman that it shulde be,
For which mervaille wondred many a man,
And saiden, whan they were in privitee,
Wol not our lord yet leve his vanitee?
Wol he not wedde? alas, alas the while!
Why wol he thus himself and us begile? 8128

But natheles this markis hath do make 8129
Of gemmes, sette in gold and in asure,
Broches and ringes, for Grisildes sake,
And of hire clothing toke he the mesure
Of a maiden like unto hire stature,
And eke of other ornamentes all,
That unto swiche a wedding shulde fall.

The time of underne of the same day 8136
Approcheth, that this wedding shulde be,
And all the paleis put was in array,
Both halle and chambres, eche in his degree,
Houses of office stuffed with plentee
Ther mayst thou see of deinteous vitaille,
That may be found, as fer as lasteth Itaille.

This real markis richely arraide, 8143
Lordes and ladies in his compagnie,
The which unto the feste weren praide,
And of his retenue the bachelerie,
With many a soun of sondry melodie,
Unto the village, of the which I told,
In this array the righte way they hold.

Grisilde of this (God wot) ful innocent,
That for hire shapen was all this array, 8151

To fetchen water at a welle is went, 8152
And cometh home as sone as ever she may.
For wel she had herd say, that thilke day
The markis shulde wedde, and if she might,
She wolde fayn han seen som of that sight.

She thought I wol with other maidens stond,
That ben my felawes, in our dore and see
The markisesse, and therto wol I fond 8159
To don at home, as sone as it may be,
The labour which that longeth unto me,
And than I may at leiser hire behold,
If she this way unto the castel hold.

And as she wolde over the threswold gon,
The markis came and gan hire for to call,
And she set doun hire water-pot anon 8166
Beside the threswold in an oxes stall,
And doun upon hire knees she gan to fall,
And with sad countenance kneleth still,
Til she had herd what was the lordes will.

This thoughtful markis spake unto this maid
Ful soberly, and said in this manere:
Wher is your fader, Grisildis? he said.
And she with reverence in humble chere
Answered, lord, he is al redy here. 8175

And in she goth withouten lenger lette,
And to the markis she hire fader fette.

He by the hond than toke this poure man,
And saide thus, whan he him had aside:
Janicola, I neither may ne can
Lenger the plesance of min herte hide,
If that thou vouchesauf, what so betide
Thy doughter wol I take or that I wend
As for my wif, unto hire lives end.

Thou lovest me, that wot I wel certain,
And art my faithful liegeman ybore,
And all that liketh me, I dare wel sain,
It liketh thee, and specially therfore
Tell me that point, that I have said before,
If that thou wolt unto this purpos drawe,
To taken me as for thy son in lawe.

This soden cas this man astoned so,
That red he wex, abaist, and al quaking
He stood, unnethes said he wordes mo,
But only thus; Lord, quod he, my willing
Is as ye wol, ne ageins your liking
I wol no thing, min owen lord so dere,
Right as you list, governeth this matere.

Than wol I, quod this markis softely, 8199
That in thy chambre, I, and thou, and she,
Have a collation, and wost thou why?
For I wol ask hire, if it hire wille be
To be my wif, and reule hire after me:
And all this shal be don in thy presence,
I wol not speke out of thin audience.

And in the chambre, while they were aboute 8206
The tretee, which as ye shul after here,
The peple came into the house withoute,
And wondred hem, in how honest manere
Ententifly she kept hire fader dere:
But utterly Grisildis wonder might,
For never erst ne saw she swiche a sight.

No wonder is though that she be astoned, 8213
To see so gret a gest come in that place,
She never was to non swiche gestes woned,
For which she loked with ful pale face.
But shortly forth this matere for to chace,
Thise arn the wordes that the markis said
To this benigne, veray, faithful maid.

Grisilde, he said, ye shuln wel understond,
It liketh to your fader and to me, 8221

That I you wedde, and eke it may so stond 8222
As I suppose, ye wol that it so be :
But thise demaundes aske I first (quod he)
That sin it shal be don in hasty wise,
Wol ye assent, or elles you avise?

I say this, be ye redy with good herte
To all my lust, and that I freely may
As me best thinketh do you laugh or smerte, 8229
And never ye to grutchen, night ne day,
And eke whan I say ya, ye say not nay,
Neither by word, ne frouning countenance ?
Swere this, and here I swere our alliance.

Wondring upon this thing, quaking for drede,
She saide ; Lord, indigne and unworthy
Am I, to thilke honour, that ye me bede, 8236
But as ye wol yourself, right so wol I:
And here I swere, that never willingly
In werk, ne thought, I n'ill you disobeie
For to be ded, though me were loth to deie.

This is ynough, Grisilde min, quod he.
And forth he goth with a ful sobre chere,
Out at the dore, and after than came she,
And to the peple he said in this manere : 8244

This is my wif, quod he, that stondeth here. 8245
Honoureth her, and loveth hire, I pray,
Who so me loveth, ther n'is no more to say.

And for that nothing of hire olde gere
She shulde bring into his hous, he bad
That women should despoilen hire right there,
Of which thise ladies weren nothing glad
To handle hire clothes wherin she was clad: 8252
But natheles this maiden bright of hew
Fro foot to hed they clothed han all new.

Hire heres han they kempt, that lay untressed
Ful rudely, and with hir fingres smal
A coroune on hire hed they han ydressed,
And sette hire ful of nouches gret and smal:
Of hire array what shuld I make a tale? 8259
Unneth the peple hire knew for hire fairnesse,
Whan she transmewed was in swiche richesse.

This markis hath hire spoused with a ring
Brought for the same cause, and than hire sette
Upon an hors snow-white, and wel ambling,
And to his paleis, or he lenger lette,
(With joyful peple, that hire lad and mette)
Conveyed hire, and thus the day they spende
In revel, til the sonne gan descende. 8268

And shortly forth this tale for to chace, 8269
I say, that to this newe markisesse
God hath swiche favour sent hire of his grace,
That it ne semeth not by likelinesse
That she was borne and fed in rudenesse,
As in a cote, or in an oxes stall,
But nourished in an emperoures hall.

To every wight waxen is so dere, 8276
And worshipful, that folk ther she was bore,
And fro hire birthe knew hire yere by yere,
Unnethes trowed they, but dorst han swore,
That to Janicle, of which I spake before,
She doughter n'as, for as by conjecture
Hem thoughte she was another creature.

For though that ever vertuous was she, 8283
She was encresed in swiche excellence
Of thewes good, yset in high bountee,
And so discrete, and faire of eloquence,
So benigne, and so digne of reverence,
And coude so the peples herte enbrace,
That eche hire loveth that loketh on hire face.

Not only of Saluces in the toun
Published was the bountee of hire name, 8291

But eke beside in many a regioun, 8292
If on saith wel, another saith the same :
So spredeth of hire hie bountee the fame,
That men and women, yong as wel as old,
Gon to Saluces upon hire to behold.

Thus Walter lowly, nay but really,
Wedded with fortunat honestetee,
In Goddes pees liveth ful esily 8299
At home, and grace ynough outward had he;
And for he saw that under low degree
Was honest vertue hid, the peple him held
A prudent man, and that is seen ful seld.

Not only this Grisildis thurgh hire wit
Coude all the fete of wifly homlinesse,
But eke whan that the cas required it, 8306
The comune profit coude she redresse :
Ther n'as discord, rancour, ne hevinesse
In all the lond, that she ne coude appese,
And wisely bring hem all in hertes ese.

Though that hire husbond absent were or non,
If gentilmen, or other of that contree
Were wroth, she wolde bringen hem at on,
So wise and ripe wordes hadde she, 8314

And jugement of so gret equitee, 8315
That she from heven sent was, as men wend,
Peple to save, and every wrong to amend.

Not longe time after that this Grisilde
Was wedded, she a doughter hath ybore,
All had hire lever han borne a knave childe .
Glad was the markis and his folk therfore,
For though a maiden childe come all before, 8322
She may unto a knave child atteine
By likelyhed, sin she n'is not barreine.

Pars tertia.

Ther fell, as it befalleth time mo,
Whan that this childe had souked but a throwe,
This markis in his herte longed so 8327
To tempt his wif, hire sadnesse for to knowe,
That he ne might out of his herte throwe
This marveillous desir his wif to assay,
Needles, God wot, he thought hire to affray.

He had assaied hire ynough before,
And found hire ever good, what nedeth it
Hire for to tempt, and alway more and more ?
Though som men praise it for a subtil wit,
But as for me, I say that evil it sit 8336

To assay a wif whan that it is no nede, 8337
And putten hire in anguish and in drede.

For which this markis wrought in this manere;
He came a-night alone ther as she lay
With sterne face, and with full trouble chere,
And sayde thus; Grisilde, (quod he) that day
That I you toke out of your poure array,
And put you in estat of high noblesse, 8344
Ye han it not forgetten, as I gesse.

I say, Grisilde, this present dignitee,
In which that I have put you, as I trow,
Maketh you not forgetful for to be
That I you toke in poure estat ful low,
For ony wele ye mote yourselven know.
Take hede of every word that I you say, 8351
Ther is no wight that hereth it but we tway.

Ye wote yourself wel how that ye came here
Into this hous, it is not long ago,
And though to me ye be right lefe and dere,
Unto my gentils ye be nothing so:
They say, to hem it is gret shame and wo
For to be suggetes, and ben in servage
To thee, that borne art of a smal linage. 8359

And namely sin thy doughter was ybore, 8360
Thise wordes han they spoken douteles,
But I desire, as I have don before,
To live my lif with hem in rest and pees:
I may not in this cas be reccheles;
I mote do with thy doughter for the best,
Not as I wold, but as my gentils lest.

And yet, God wote, this is ful loth to me: 8367
But natheles withouten youre weting
I wol nought do, but thus wol I (quod he)
That ye to me assenten in this thing.
Shew now youre patience in youre werking,
That ye me hight and swore in youre village
The day that maked was our mariage.

Whan she had herd all this, she not ameved 8374
Neyther in word, in chere, ne countenance,
(For as it semed, she was not agreved)
She sayde; Lord, all lith in your plesance,
My child and I, with hertily obeisance
Ben youres all, and ye may save or spill,
Your owen thing: werketh after your will.

Ther may no thing, so God my soule save,
Like unto you, that may displesen me: 8382

Ne I desire nothing for to have, 8383
Ne drede for to lese, sauf only ye:
This will is in myn herte, and ay shal be,
No length of time, or deth may this deface,
Ne change my corage to an other place.

Glad was this markis for hire answering,
But yet he feined as he were not so,
Al drery was his chere and his loking, 8390
Whan that he shuld out of the chambre go.
Sone after this, a furlong way or two,
He prively hath told all his entent
Unto a man, and to his wif him sent.

A maner sergeant was this prive man,
The which he faithful often founden had
In thinges gret, and eke swiche folk wel can 8397
Don execution on thinges bad:
The lord knew wel, that he him loved and drad.
And whan this sergeant wist his lordes will,
Into the chambre he stalked him ful still.

Madame, he sayd, ye mote foryeve it me,
Though I do thing, to which I am constreined:
Ye ben so wise, that right wel knowen ye,
That lordes hestes may not ben yfeined, 8405

They may wel be bewailed and complained,
But men mote nedes to hir lust obey,
And so wol I, ther n'is no more to say.

This child I am commanded for to take.
And spake no more, but out the child he hent
Despitously, and gan a chere to make,
As though he wold have slain it, or he went.
Grisildis most al suffer and al consent:
And as a lambe, she sitteth meke and still,
And let this cruel sergeant do his will.

Suspecious was the diffame of this man,
Suspect his face, suspect his word also,
Suspect the time in which he this began:
Alas! hire doughter, that she loved so,
She wende he wolde han slaien it right tho,
But natheles she neitber wept ne siked,
Conforming hire to that the markis liked

But at the last to speken she began,
And mekely she to the sergeant praid
(So as he was a worthy gentil man)
That she might kisse hire child, or that it deid:
And in hire barme this litel child she leid,
With ful sad face, and gan the child to blisse,
And lulled it, and after gan it kisse.

And thus she sayd in hire benigne vois : 8430
Farewel, my child, I shal thee never see,
But sin I have thee marked with the crois,
Of thilke fader yblessed mote thou be,
That for us died upon a crois of tree :
Thy soule, litel child, I him betake,
For this night shalt thou dien for my sake.

I trow that to a norice in this cas 8437
It had ben hard this routhe for to see :
Wel might a moder than han cried alas,
But natheles so sad stedfast was she,
That she endured all adversitee,
And to the sergeant mekely she sayde,
Have here agen your litel yonge mayde.

Goth now (quod she) and doth my lordes hest :
And o thing wold I pray you of your grace, 8445
But if my lord forbade you at the lest,
Burieth this litel body in som place,
That bestes ne no briddes it to-race.
But he no word to that purpos wold say,
But toke the child and went upon his way.

This sergeant came unto his lord again,
And of Grisildes wordes and hire chere 8452

He told him point for point, in short and plain, 8453
And him presented with his doughter dere.
Somwhat this lord hath routhe in his manere,
But natheles his purpos held he still,
As lordes don, whan they wol have hir will.

And bad this sergeant that he prively
Shulde this child ful softe wind and wrappe,
With alle circumstances tendrely, 8460
And carry it in a cofre, or in a lappe;
But upon peine his hed of for to swappe
That no man shulde know of his entent,
Ne whens he came, ne whider that he went;

But at Boloigne, unto his suster dere,
That thilke time of Pavie was countesse,
He shuld it take, and shew hire this matere, 8467
Beseching hire to don hire besinesse
This child to fostren in all gentillesse,
And whos child that it was he bade hire hide
From every wight, for ought that may betide.

This sergeant goth, and hath fulfilde this thing.
But to this marquis now retorne we;
For now goth he ful fast imagining,
If by his wives chere he mighte see, 8475

Or by hire wordes apperceive, that she 8476
Were changed, but he never coud hire finde,
But ever in on ylike sad and kinde.

As glad, as humble, as besy in service
And eke in love, as she was wont to be,
Was she to him, in every maner wise ;
Ne of hire doughter not a word spake she :
Non accident for non adversitee 8483
Was seen in hire, ne never hire doughters name
Ne nevened she, for ernest ne for game.

Pars quarta

In this estat ther passed ben foure yere
Er she with childe was, but as God wold,
A knave childe she bare by this Waltere 8488
Ful gracious, and fair for to behold :
And whan that folk it to his fader told,
Not only he, but all his contree mery
Was for this childe, and God they thonke and hery.

Whan it was two yere old, and from the brest
Departed of his norice, on a day
This markis caughte yet another lest
To tempte his wif yet ofter, if he may. 8496

O! nedeles was she tempted in assay.
But wedded men ne connen no mesure,
Whan that they finde a patient creature.

Wif, quod this markis, ye han herd or this
My peple sikely beren our mariage,
And namely sin my sone yboren is,
Now is it werse than everin al our age:
The murmur sleth myn herte and my corage,
For to myn eres cometh the vois so smerte,
That it wel nie destroyed hath myn herte.

Now say they thus, whan Walter is agon,
Than shal the blood of Janicle succede,
And ben our lord, for other han we non:
Swiche wordes sayn my peple, it is no drede.
Wel ought I of swiche murmur taken hede,
For certainly I drede al swiche sentence,
Though they not plainen in myn audience.

I wolde live in pees, if that I might:
Wherfore I am disposed utterly,
As I his suster served er by night,
Right so thinke I to serve him prively.
This warne I you, that ye not sodenly
Out of yourself for no wo shuld outraie,
Beth patient, and therof I you praie.

I have, quod she, sayd thus and ever shal, 8521
I wol no thing, ne n'ill no thing certain,
But as you list: not greveth me at al,
Though that my doughter and my sone be slain
At your commandement: that is to sain,
I have not had no part of children twein,
But first sikenesse, and after wo and peine.

Ye ben my lord, doth with your owen thing 8528
Right as you list, asketh no rede of me:
For as I left at home al my clothing
Whan I came first to you, right so (quod she)
Left I my will and al my libertee,
And toke your clothing; wherfore I you prey,
Doth your plesance, I wol youre lust obey.

And certes, if I hadde prescience 8535
Your will to know, er ye your lust me told,
I wold it do withouten negligence:
But now I wote your lust, and what ye wold,
All your plesance ferme and stable I hold,
For wist I that my deth might do you ese,
Right gladly wold I dien, you to plese.

Deth may not maken no comparisoun
Unto your love: and whan this markis say 8543

The constance of his wif, he cast adoun 8544
His eyen two, and wondreth how she may
In patience suffer al this array:
And forth he goth with drery contenance,
But to his herte it was ful gret plesance.

This ugly sergeant in the same wise
That he hire doughter caughte, right so he
(Or werse, if men can any werse devise) 8551
Hath hent hire sone, that ful was of beautee:
And ever in on so patient was she,
That she no chere made of hevinesse,
But kist hire sone and after gan it blesse.

Save this she praied him, if that he might,
Hire litel sone he wold in erthe grave,
His tendre limmes, delicat to sight, 8558
Fro foules and fro bestes for to save.
But she non answer of him mighte have,
He went his way, as him no thing ne rought,
But to Boloigne he tendrely it brought.

This markis wondreth ever lenger the more
Upon hire patience, and if that he
Ne hadde sothly knowen therbefore,
That parfitly hire children loved she,
He wold han wend that of som subtiltee 8567

And of malice, or for cruel corage, 8568
That she had suffred this with sad visage.

But wel he knew, that next himself, certain
She loved hire children best in every wise.
But now of women wold I asken fayn,
If thise assaies mighten not suffise;
What coud a sturdy husbond more devise
To preve hire wifhood, and hire stedfastnesse, 8575
And he continuing ever in sturdinesse?

But ther ben folk of swiche condition,
That, whan they han a certain purpos take,
They can not stint of hir entention,
But, right as they were bounden to a stake,
They wol not of hir firste purpos slake:
Right so this markis fully hath purposed 8582
To tempt his wif, as he was first disposed.

He waiteth, if by word or contenance
That she to him was changed of corage:
But never coud he finden variance,
She was ay on in herte and in visage,
And ay the further that she was in age,
The more trewe (if that it were possible)
She was to him in love, and more penible. 8590

For which it semed thus, that of hem two 8591
Ther was but o will; for as Walter lest,
The same lust was hire plesance also;
And God be thanked, all fell for the best.
She shewed wel, for no worldly unrest
A wif, as of hireself, no thing ne sholde
Wille in effect, but as hire husbond wolde.

The sclandre of Walter wonder wide spradde, 8598
That of a cruel herte he wikkedly,
For he a poure woman wedded hadde,
Hath murdred both his children prively:
Swich murmur was among hem comunly.
No wonder is: for to the peples ere
Ther came no word, but that they murdred were.

For which ther as his peple therbefore 8605
Had loved him wel, the sclandre of his diffame
Made hem that they him hateden therfore:
To ben a murdrour is an hateful name.
But natheles, for ernest ne for game,
He of his cruel purpos n'olde stente,
To tempt his wif was sette all his entente.

Whan that his doughter twelf yere was of age,
He to the court of Rome, in subtil wise 8613

Enformed of his will, sent his message, 8614
Commanding him, swiche billes to devise,
As to his cruel purpos may suffise,
How that the pope, as for his peples rest
Bade him to wed another, if him lest.

I say he bade, they shulden contrefete
The popes bulles, making mention
That he hath leve his firste wif to lete, 8621
As by the popes dispensation,
To stinten rancour and dissension
Betwix his peple and him: thus spake the bull,
The which they han published at the full.

The rude peple, as no wonder is,
Wenden ful wel, that it had ben right so:
But whan thise tidings came to Grisildis, 8628
I deme that hire herte was ful of wo;
But she ylike sad for evermo
Disposed was, this humble creature,
The adversitee of fortune al to endure;

Abiding ever his lust and his plesance,
To whom that she was yeven, herte and al,
As to hire veray worldly suffisance.
But shortly if this storie tell I shal, 8636

This markis writen hath in special 8637
A lettre, in which he sheweth his entente,
And secretly he to Boloigne it sent,

To the erl of Pavie, which that hadde tho
Wedded his suster, prayed he specially
To bringen home agein his children two
In honourable estat al openly:
But o thing he him prayed utterly, 8644
That he to no wight, though men wold enquere,
Shulde not tell whos children that they were,

But say, the maiden shuld ywedded be
Unto the markis of Saluces anon.
And as this erl was prayed, so did he,
For at day sette he on his way is gon
Toward Saluces, and lordes many on 8651
In rich arraie, this maiden for to gide,
Hire yonge brother riding hire beside.

Arraied was toward hire mariage
This fresshe maiden, ful of gemmes clere,
Hire brother, which that seven yere was of age,
Arraied eke ful fresh in his manere:
And thus in gret noblesse and with glad chere 8658

Toward Saluces shaping hir journay
Fro day to day they riden in hir way.

Pars quinta.

Among al this, after his wicked usage,
This markis yet his wif to tempten more
To the uttereste prefe of hire corage,
Fully to have experience and lore,
If that she were as stedefast as before,
He on a day in open audience
Ful boistously hath said hire this sentence:

Certes, Grisilde, I had ynough plesance
To han you to my wif, for your goodnesse,
And for your trouthe, and for your obeysance,
Not for your linage, ne for your richesse,
But now know I in veray sothfastnesse,
That in gret lordship, if I me wel avise,
Ther is gret servitude in sondry wise.

I may not don, as every ploughman may:
My peple me constreineth for to take
Another wif, and crien day by day;
And eke the pope rancour for to slake
Consenteth it, that dare I undertake:

And trewely, thus moche I wol you say,
My newe wif is coming by the way.

Be strong of herte, and voide anon hire place,
And thilke dower that ye broughten me
Take it agen, I grant it of my grace.
Returneth to your fadres hous, (quod he)
No man may alway have prosperitee.
With even herte I rede you to endure
The stroke of fortune, or of aventure.

And she agen answerd in patience:
My lord, quod she, I wote, and wist alway,
How that betwixen your magnificence
And my poverte no wight ne can ne may
Maken comparison, it is no nay;
I ne held me never digne in no manere
To be your wif, ne yet your chamberere.

And in this hous, ther ye me lady made,
(The highe God take I for my witnesse,
And all so wisly he my soule glad)
I never held me lady ne maistresse,
But humble servant to your worthinesse,
And ever shal, while that my lif may dure,
Aboven every worldly creature.

That ye so longe of your benignitee 8703
Han holden me in honour and nobley,
Wheras I was not worthy for to be,
That thanke I God and you, to whom I prey
Foryelde it you, ther is no more to sey:
Unto my fader gladly wol I wende,
And with him dwell unto my lives ende;

Ther I was fostred of a childe ful smal, 8710
Til I be ded my lif ther wol I lede,
A widew clene in body, herte and al.
For sith I yave to you my maidenhede,
And am your trewe wif, it is no drede,
God shilde swiche a lordes wif to take
Another man to husbond or to make.

And of your newe wif, God of his grace 8717
So graunte you wele and prosperite:
For I wol gladly yelden hire my place,
In which that I was blisful wont to be.
For sith it liketh you, my lord, (quod she)
That whilom weren all myn hertes rest,
That I shal gon, I wol go whan you lest.

But ther as ye me profre swiche dowaire
As I first brought, it is wel in my mind, 8725

It were my wretched clothes, nothing faire,
The which to me were hard now for to find.
O goode God! how gentil and how kind
Ye semed by your speche and your visage,
The day that maked was oure marriage!

But soth is said, algate I find it trewe,
For in effect it preved is on me,
Love is not old, as whan that it is newe.
But certes, lord, for non adversitee
To dien in this cas, it shal not be
That ever in word or werke I shal repent,
That I you yave min herte in hole entent.

My lord, ye wote, that in my fadres place
Ye dide me stripe out of my poure wede,
And richely ye clad me of your grace;
To you brought I nought elles out of drede,
But faith, and nakednesse, and maidenhede;
And here agen your clothing I restore,
And eke your wedding ring for evermore.

The remenant of your jeweles redy be
Within your chambre, I dare it safly sain:
Naked out of my fadres hous (quod she)
I came, and naked I mote turne again.

All your plesance wolde I folwe fain : 8749
But yet I hope it be not your entent,
That I smokles out of your paleis went.

Ye coude not do so dishonest a thing,
That thilke wombe, in which your children lay,
Shulde before the peple, in my walking,
Be seen al bare : wherfore I you pray
Let me not like a worme go by the way : 8756
Remembre you, min owen lord so dere,
I was your wif, though I unworthy were.

Wherfore in guerdon of my maidenhede,
Which that I brought and not agen I bere,
As vouchesauf to yeve me to my mede
But swiche a smok as I was wont to were,
That I therwith may wrie the wombe of hire 8763
That was your wif: and here I take my leve
Of you, min owen lord, lest I you greve.

The smok, quod he, that thou hast on thy bake,
Let it be still, and bere it forth with thee.
But wel unnethes thilke word he spake,
But went his way for routhe and for pitee.
Before the folk hireselven stripeth she,
And in hire smok, with foot and hed al bare,
Toward hire fadres hous forth is she fare. 8772

The folk hire folwen weping in hir wey, 8773
And fortune ay they cursen as they gon:
But she fro weping kept hire eyen drey,
Ne in this time word ne spake she non.
Hire fader, that this tiding herd anon,
Curseth the day and time, that nature
Shope him to ben a lives creature.

For out of doute this olde poure man 8780
Was ever in suspect of hire mariage:
For ever he demed, sin it first began,
That whan the lord fulfilled had his corage,
Him wolde thinke it were a disparage
To his estat, so lowe for to alight,
And voiden hire as sone as ever he might.

Agein his doughter hastily goth he, 8787
(For he by noise of folk knew hire coming)
And with hire olde cote, as it might be,
He covereth hire ful sorwefully weping:
But on hire body might he it not bring,
For rude was the cloth, and more of age
By daies fele than at hire mariage.

Thus with hire fader for a certain space
Dwelleth this flour of wifly patience, 8795

That nother by hire wordes ne hire face, 8796
Beforn the folk, ne eke in hir absence,
Ne shewed she that hire was don offence,
Ne of hire high estat no remembrance
Ne hadde she, as by hire contenance.

No wonder is, for in hire gret estat
Hire gost was ever in pleine humilitee;
No tendre mouth, no herte delicat, 8803
No pompe, no semblant of realtee;
But ful of patient benignitee,
Discrete, and prideles, ay honourable,
And to hire husbond ever meke and stable.

Men speke of Job, and most for his humblesse,
As clerkes, whan hem list, can wel endite,
Namely of men, but as in sothfastnesse, 8810
Though clerkes preisen women but a lite,
Ther can no man in humblesse him acquite
As woman can, ne can be half so trewe
As women ben, but it be falle of newe.

Pars sexta.

Fro Boloigne is the erl of Pavie come,
Of which the fame up sprang to more and lesse: 8816

And to the peples eres all and some 8817
Was couth eke, that a newe markisesse
He with him brought, in swiche pomp and richesse,
That never was ther seen with mannes eye
So noble array in al West Lumbardie.

The markis, which that shope and knew all this,
Er that this erl was come, sent his message
For thilke poure sely Grisildis, 8824
And she with humble herte and glad visage,
Not with no swollen thought in hire corage,
Came at his hest, and on hire knees hire sette,
And reverently and wisely she him grette.

Grisilde, (quod he) my will is utterly,
This maiden, that shal wedded be to me,
Received be to-morwe as really 8831
As it possible is in myn hous to be:
And eke that every wight in his degree
Have his estat in sitting and service,
And high plesance, as I can best devise.

I have no woman suffisant certain
The chambres for to array in ordinance
After my lust, and therfore wolde I fain,
That thin were all swiche manere governance: 8839

Thou knowest eke of old all my plesance; 8840
Though thin array he bad, and evil besey,
Do thou thy devoir at the leste wey.

Not only, lord, that I am glad (quod she)
To don your lust, but I desire also
You for to serve and plese in my degree,
Withouten fainting, and shal evermo:
Ne never for no wele, ne for no wo, 8847
Ne shal the gost within myn herte stente
To love you best with all my trewe entente.

And with that word she gan the hous to dight,
And tables for to sette, and beddes make,
And peined her to don all that she might,
Praying the chambereres for Goddes sake
To hasten hem, and faste swepe and shake, 8854
And she the most serviceable of all
Hath every chambre arraied, and his hall.

Abouten undern gan this erl alight,
That with him brought thise noble children twey:
For which the peple ran to see the sight
Of hir array, so richely besey:
And than at erst amonges hem they sey,
That Walter was no fool, though that him lest
To change his wif; for it was for the best. 8863

For she is fairer, as they demen all, 8864
Than is Grisilde, and more tendre of age,
And fairer fruite betwene hem shulde fall,
And more plesant for hire high linage:
Hire brother eke so faire was of visage,
That hem to seen the peple hath caught plesance,
Commending now the markis governance.

O stormy peple, unsad and ever untrewe, 8871
And undiscrete, and changing as a fane,
Delighting ever in rombel that is newe,
For like the mone waxen ye and wane:
Ay ful of clapping, dere ynough a jane,
Your dome is fals, your constance evil preveth,
A ful gret fool is he that on you leveth.

Thus saiden sade folk in that citee, 8878
Whan that the peple gased up and doun:
For they were glad, right for the noveltee,
To have a newe lady of hir toun.
No more of this make I now mentioun,
But to Grisilde agen I wol me dresse,
And telle hire constance, and hire besinesse.

Ful besy was Grisilde in every thing,
That to the feste was appertinent; 8886

Right naught was she abaist of hire clothing, 8887
Though it were rude, and somdel eke to-rent,
But with glad chere to the yate is went
With other folk, to grete the markisesse,
And after that doth forth hire besinesse.

With so glad chere his gestes she receiveth,
And conningly everich in his degree,
That no defaute no man apperceiveth, 8894
But ay they wondren what she mighte be,
That in so poure array was for to see,
And coude swiche honour and reverence,
And worthily they priesen hire prudence.

In all these mene while she ne stent
This maide and eke hire brother to commend
With all hire herte in ful benigne entent, 8901
So wel, that no man coud hire preise amend :
But at the last whan that thise lordes wend
To sitten doun to mete, he gan to call
Grisilde, as she was besy in the hall.

Grisilde, (quod he, as it were in his play)
How liketh thee my wif, and hire beautee ?
Right wel, my lord, quod she, for in good fay,
A fairer saw I never non than she : 8909

I pray to God yeve you prosperitee; 8910
And so I hope, that he wol to you send
Plesance ynough unto your lives end.

O thing beseche I you and warne also,
That ye ne prikke with no turmenting
This tendre maiden, as ye han do mo:
For she is fostred in hire norishing
More tendrely, and to my supposing 8917
She mighte not adversitee endure,
As coude a poure fostred creature.

And whan this Walter saw hire patience,
Hire glade chere, and no malice at all,
And he so often hadde hire don offence,
And she ay sade and constant as a wall,
Continuing ever hire innocence over all, 8924
This sturdy markis gan his herte dresse
To rewe upon hire wifly stedefastnesse.

This is ynough, Grisilde min, quod he,
Be now no more agast, ne evil apaid,
I have thy faith and thy benignitee,
As wel as ever woman was, assaid
In gret estat, and pourelich arraid:
Now know I, dere wif, thy stedefastnesse,
And hire in armes toke, and gan to kesse. 8933

And she for wonder toke of it no kepe; 8934
She herde not what thing he to hire said;
She ferde as she had stert out of a slepe,
Til she out of hire masednesse abraid.
Grisilde, quod he, by God that for us deid,
Thou art my wif, non other I ne have,
Ne never had, as God my soule save.

This is thy doughter, which thou hast supposed 8941
To be my wif; that other faithfully
Shal be min heir, as I have ay disposed;
Thou bare hem of thy body trewely:
At Boloigne have I kept hem prively:
Take hem agen, for now maist thou not say,
That thou hast lorn non of thy children tway.

And folk, that otherwise han said of me, 8948
I warne hem wel, that I have don this dede
For no malice, ne for no crueltee,
But for to assay in thee thy womanhede:
And not to slee my children (God forbede)
But for to kepe hem prively and still,
Til I thy purpos knew, and all thy will.

Whan she this herd aswoune doun she falleth
For pitous joye, and after hire swouning
She both hire yonge children to hire calleth, 8987

And in hire armes pitously weping 8958
Embraceth hem, and tendrely kissing
Ful like a moder with hire salte teres
She bathed both hir visage and hir heres.

O, which a pitous thing it was to see
Hire swouning, and hire humble vois to here!
Grand mercy, lord, God thank it you (quod she)
That ye han saved me my children dere: 8965
Now rekke I never to be ded right here,
Sin I stond in your love, and in your grace,
No force of deth, ne whan my spirit pace.

O tendre, o dere, o yonge children mine,
Your woful mother wened stedfastly,
That cruel houndes, or som foul vermine
Had eten you; but God of his mercy, 8972
And your benigne fader tendrely
Hath don you kepe: and in that same stound
Al sodenly she swapt adoun to ground.

And in hire swough so sadly holdeth she
Hire children two, whan she gan hem embrace,
That with gret sleight and gret difficultee
The children from hire arm they gan arrace:
O! many a tere on many a pitous face 8980

Doun ran of hem that stoden hire beside,
Unnethe abouten hire might they abide.

Walter hire gladeth, and hire sorwe slaketh,
She riseth up abashed from hire trance,
And every wight hire joye and feste maketh,
Til she hath caught agen hire contenance.
Walter hire doth so faithfully plesance,
That it was deintee for to seen the chere
Betwix hem two, sin they ben met in fere.

Thise ladies, whan that they hir time sey,
Han taken hire, and into chambre gon,
And stripen hire out of hire rude arrey,
And in a cloth of gold that brighte shone,
With a coroune of many a riche stone
Upon hire hed, they into hall hire broughte:
And ther she was honoured as hire ought.

Thus hath this pitous day a blisful end;
For every man, and woman, doth his might
This day in mirth and revel to dispend,
Til on the welkin shone the sterres bright:
For more solempne in every mannes sight
This feste was, and greter of costage,
Than was the revel of hire mariage.

Ful many a yere in high prosperitee 9004
Liven thise two in concord and in rest,
And richely his doughter maried he
Unto a lord, on of the worthiest
Of all Itaille, and than in pees and rest
His wives fader in his court he kepeth,
Til that the soule out of his body crepeth.

His sone succedeth in his heritage, 9011
In rest and pees, after his fadres day:
And fortunat was eke in mariage,
Al put he not his wif in gret assay:
This world is not so strong, it is no nay,
As it hath ben in olde times yore,
And herkneth, what this auctour saith therfore.

This story is said, not for that wives shuld 9018
Folwe Grisilde, as in humilitee,
For it were importable, tho they wold;
But for that every wight in his degree
Shulde be constant in adversitee,
As was Grisilde, therfore Petrark writeth
This storie, which with high stile he enditeth.

For sith a woman was so patient
Unto a mortal man, wel more we ought 9026

Receiven all in gree that God us sent. 9027
For gret skill is he preve that he wrought:
But he ne tempteth no man that he bought,
As saith seint Jame, if ye his pistell rede;
He preveth folk al day, it is no drede.

And suffreth us, as for our exercise,
With sharpe scourges of adversitee,
Ful often to be bete in sondry wise; 9034
Not for to know our will, for certes he
Or we were borne, knew all our freeletee;
And for our best is all his governance;
Let us than live in vertuous suffrance.

But o word, lordings, herkeneth, or I go:
It were ful hard to finden now adayes
In all a toun Grisildes three or two: 9041
For if that they were put to swiche assayes,
The gold of hem hath now so bad alayes
With bras, that though the coine be faire at eye,
It wolde rather brast atwo than plie.

For which here, for the wives love of Bathe,
Whos lif and al hire secte God maintene
In high maistrie, and elles were it scathe,
I wol with lusty herte fresshe and grene, 9049

Say you a song to gladen you, I wene : 9050
And let us stint of ernestful matere.
Herkneth my song, that saith in this manere.

Grisilde is ded, and eke hire patience,
And both at ones buried in Itaille :
For which I crie in open audience,
No wedded man so hardy be to assaille
His wives patience, in trust to find 9057
Grisildes, for in certain he shal faille.

O noble wives, ful of high prudence,
Let non humilitee your tonges naile :
Ne let no clerk have cause or diligence
To write of you a storie of swiche mervaille,
As of Grisildis patient and kinde,
Lest Chichevache you swalwe in hire entraille. 9064

Folweth ecco, that holdeth no silence,
But ever answereth at the countretaille :
Beth not bedaffed for your innocence,
But sharply taketh on you the governaille :
Emprenteth wel this lesson in your minde,
For comun profit, sith it may availle.

Ye archewives, stondeth ay at defence, 9071

Sin ye be strong, as is a gret camaille,
Ne suffreth not, that men do you offence.
And sclendre wives, feble as in bataille,
Beth egre as is a tigre yond in Inde;
Ay clappeth as a mill, I you counsaille.

Ne drede hem not, doth hem no reverence,
For though thin husbond armed be in maille,
The arwes of thy crabbed eloquence
Shal perce his brest, and eke his aventaille:
In jalousie I rede eke thou him binde,
And thou shalt make him couche as doth a quaille.

If thou be faire, ther folk ben in presence
Shew thou thy visage, and thin apparaille:
If thou be foule, be free of thy dispence,
To get thee frendes ay do thy travaille:
Be ay of chere as light as lefe on linde,
And let him care, and wepe, and wringe, and waille.

THE MARCHANTES PROLOGUE.

Weping and wailing, care and other sorwe
I have ynough, on even and on morwe,
Quod the marchant, and so have other mo,
That wedded ben; I trowe that it be so:

For wel I wot it fareth so by me. 9093
I have a wif, the werste that may be,
For though the fend to hire ycoupled were,
She wolde him overmatche I dare wel swere.
What shulde I you reherse in special
Hire high malice? she is a shrew at al.
  Ther is a long and a large difference
Betwix Grisildes grete patience,
And of my wife the passing crueltee. 9101
Were I unbounden, all so mote I the,
I wolde never eft comen in the snare.
We wedded men live in sorwe and care,
Assay it who so wol, and he shal finde
That I say soth, by seint Thomas of Inde,
As for the more part, I say not alle;
God shilde that it shulde so befalle.
  A good sire hoste, I have ywedded be 9109
Thise monethes two, and more not parde;
And yet I trowe that he, that all his lif
Wifles hath ben, though that men wolde him rife
Into the herte, ne coude in no manere
Tellen so much sorwe, as I you here
Coud tellen of my wives cursednesse.
  Now, quod our hoste, marchant, so God you blesse,
Sin ye so mochel knowen of that art,
Ful hertely I pray you tell us part. 9113

Gladly, quod he, but of min owen sore 9119
For sory herte I tellen may no more.

THE MARCHANTES TALE.

WHILOM ther was dwelling in Lumbardie
A worthy knight, that born was at Pavie,
In which he lived in gret prosperitee; 9123
And sixty yere a wifles man was he,
And folwed ay his bodily delit
On women, ther as was his appetit,
As don thise fooles that ben seculere.
And whan that he was passed sixty yere,
Were it for holinesse or for dotage,
I cannot sain, but swiche a gret corage
Hadde this knight to ben a wedded man, 9131
That day and night he doth all that he can
To espien, wher that he might wedded be;
Praying our lord to granten him, that he
Mighte ones knowen of that blisful lif,
That is betwix an husbond and his wif,
And for to live under that holy bond,
With which God firste man and woman bond.
Non other lif (said he) is worth a bene:
For wedlok is so esy and so clene, 9140

That in this world it is a paradise. 9141
Thus saith this olde knight, that was so wise.
And certainly, as soth as God is king,
To take a wif, it is a glorious thing,
And namely whan a man is old and hore,
Than is a wif the fruit of his tresore;
Than shuld he take a yong wif and a faire,
On which he might engendren him an heire,
And lede his lif in joye and in solas, 9149
Wheras thise bachelers singen alas,
Whan that they finde any adversitee
In love, which n'is but childish vanitee.
And trewely it sit wel to be so,
That bachelers have often peine and wo:
On brotel ground they bilde, and brotelnesse
They finden, whan they wenen sikernesse:
They live but as a bird or as a beste, 9157
In libertee and under non areste,
Ther as a wedded man in his estat
Liveth a lif blisful and ordinat,
Under the yoke of mariage ybound:
Wel may his herte in joye and blisse abound.
For who can be so buxom as a wif?
Who is so trewe and eke so ententif
To kepe him, sike and hole, as is his make?
For wele or wo she n'ill him not forsake: 9166

She n'is not wery him to love and serve, 9167
Though that he lie bedrede til that he sterve.
And yet som clerkes sain, it is not so,
Of which he Theophrast is on of tho:
What force though Theophrast list for to lie?
Ne take no wif, quod he, for husbondrie,
As for to spare in houshold thy dispence:
A trewe servant doth more diligence
Thy good to kepe, than doth thin owen wif, 9175
For she wol claimen half part al hire lif.
And if that thou be sike, so God me save,
Thy veray frendes or a trewe knave
Wol kepe thee bet than she, that waiteth ay
After thy good, and hath don many a day.
This sentence, and an hundred thinges werse
Writeth this man ther God his bones curse.
But take no kepe of al swiche vanitee, 9183
Defieth Theophrast, and herkeneth me.
A wif is Goddes yefte veraily;
All other maner yeftes hardely,
As londes, rentes, pasture, or commune,
Or mebles, all ben yeftes of fortune,
That passen as a shadow on the wall:
But drede thou not, if plainly speke I shal,
A wif wol last and in thin hous endure,
Wel lenger than thee list paraventure. 9192

Mariage is a ful gret sacrament;
He which that hath no wif I hold him shent;
He liveth helples, and all desolat:
(I speke of folk in seculer estat)
And herkneth why, I say not this for nought,
That woman is for mannes helpe ywrought.
The highe God, whan he had Adam maked,
And saw him al alone belly naked,
God of his grete goodnesse saide than,
Let us now make an helpe unto this man
Like to himself, and than he made him Eve.
Here may ye see, and hereby may ye preve,
That a wif is mannes helpe and his comfort,
His paradis terrestre and his disport:
So buxom and so vertuous is she,
They mosten nedes live in unitee:
O flesh they ben, and o flesh, as I gesse,
Hath but on herte in wele and in distresse.
A wif? a! seinte Marie, *benedicite*,
How might a man have any adversite
That hath a wif? certes I cannot seye.
The blisse the which that is betwix hem tweye
Ther may no tonge telle or herte thinke.
If he be poure, she helpeth him to swinke;
She kepeth his good, and wasteth never a del;
All that hire hosbond doth, hire liketh wel;

She saith not ones nay, whan he saith ye; 9219
Do this, saith he; al redy, sire, said she.
O blisful ordre, o wedlok precious,
Thou art so mery, and eke so vertuous,
And so commended, and approved eke,
That every man that holt him worth a leke,
Upon his bare knees ought all his lif
Thanken his God, that him hath sent a wif,
Or elles pray to God him for to send 9227
A wif, to last unto his lives end.
For than his lif is set in sikernesse,
He may not be deceived, as I gesse,
So that he werche after his wives rede;
Than may he boldly beren up his hede,
They ben so trewe, and therwithal so wise.
For which, if thou wilt werchen as the wise,
Do alway so, as women wol thee rede. 9235
Lo how that Jacob, as thise clerkes rede,
By good conseil of his mother Rebekke
Bounde the kiddes skin about his nekke;
For which his fadres benison he wan.
Lo Judith, as the storie eke tell can.
By good conseil she Goddes peple kept,
And slow him Holofernes while he slept.
Lo Abigail, by good conseil how she
Saved hire husbond Nabal, whan that he 9244

Shuld han be slain. And loke, Hester also
By good conseil delivered out of wo
The peple of God, and made him Mardochee
Of Assuere enhaunsed for to be.
Ther n'is no thing in gree superlatif
(As saith Senek) above an humble wif.
Suffer thy wives tonge, as Caton bit,
She shal command, and thou shalt suffren it,
And yet she wol obey of curtesie.
A wif is keper of thin husbondrie:
Wel may the sike man bewaile and wepe,
Ther as ther is no wif the hous to kepe.
I warne thee, if wisely thou wilt werche,
Love wel thy wif, as Crist loveth his cherche:
If thou lovest thyself, love thou thy wif.
No man hateth his flesh, but in his lif
He fostreth it, and therfore bid I thee
Cherish thy wif, or thou shalt never the.
Husbond and wif, what so men jape or play,
Of worldly folk holden the siker way:
They ben so knit, ther may non harm betide,
And namely upon the wives side.
For which this January, of whom I told,
Considered hath within his dayes old
The lusty lif, the vertuous quiete,
That is in mariage hony-swete.

And for his frendes on a day he sent 9271
To tellen hem th' effect of his entent.
With face sad, his tale he hath hem told:
He sayde, frendes, I am hore and old,
And almost (God wot) on my pittes brinke,
Upon my soule somwhat most I thinke.
I have my body folily dispended,
Blessed be God that it shal ben amended:
For I wol ben certain a wedded man, 9279
And that anon in all the hast I can.
Unto som maiden, faire and tendre of age,
I pray you shapeth for my mariage
All sodenly, for I wol not abide:
And I wol fonde to espien on my side,
To whom I may be wedded hastily.
But for as moche as ye ben more than I,
Ye shullen rather swiche a thing espien 9287
Than I, and wher me beste were to allien.
But o thing warn I you, my frendes dere,
I wol non old wif han in no manere:
She shal not passen twenty yere certain.
Old fish and yonge flesh wold I have fain.
Bet is (quod he) a pike than a pikerel,
And bet than old beef is the tendre veel.
I wol no woman thirty yere of age,
It is but benestraw and gret forage. 9296

And eke thise olde widewes (God it wote) 9297
They connen so moch craft on Wades bote,
So mochel broken harm whan that hem lest,
That with hem shuld I never live in rest.
For sondry scoles maken subtil clerkes;
Woman of many scoles half a clerk is.
But certainly, a yong thing men may gie,
Right as men may warm wax with handes plie.
Wherfore I say you plainly in a clause, 9305
I wol non old wif han right for this cause.
For if so were I hadde swiche meschance,
That I in hire ne coude have no plesance,
Than shuld I lede my lif in avoutrie,
And so streight to the devil whan I die.
Ne children shuld I non upon hire geten:
Yet were me lever houndes had me eten,
Than that min heritage shulde fall 9313
In straunge hondes: and this I tell you all.
I dote not, I wot the cause why
Men shulden wedde: and furthermore wot I,
Ther speketh many a man of mariage,
That wot no more of it than wot my page,
For which causes a man shuld take a wif.
If he ne may not liven chast his lif,
Take him a wif with gret devotion,
Because of leful procreation 9322

Of children, to the honour of God above, 9323
And not only for paramour or love;
And for they shulden lecherie eschue,
And yeld hir dette whan that it is due:
Or for that eche of hem shuld helpen other
In meschefe, as a suster shal the brother,
And live in chastitee ful holily.
But, sires, (by your leve) that am not I,
For God be thanked, I dare make avaunt, 9331
I fele my limmes stark and suffisant
To don all that a man belongeth to:
I wot myselven best what I may do.
Though I be hoor, I fare as doth a tre,
That blosmeth er the fruit ywoxen be;
The blosmy tre n'is neither drie ne ded:
I fele me no wher hoor but on my hed.
Min herte and all my limmes ben as grene, 9339
As laurer thurgh the yere is for to sene.
And sin that ye han herd all min entent,
I pray you to my will ye wolde assent.
Diverse men diversely him told
Of mariage many ensamples old;
Som blamed it, som praised it certain;
But atte laste, shortly for to sain,
(As all day falleth altercation,
Betwixen frendes in disputison) 9348

Ther fell a strif betwix his brethren two,
Of which that on was cleped Placebo,
Justinus sothly called was that other.
  Placebo sayd; O January brother,
Ful litel nede han ye, my lord so dere,
Conseil to aske of any that is here:
But that ye ben so ful of sapience,
That you ne liketh for your high prudence,
To weiven fro the word of Salomon.
This word sayd he unto us everich on;
Werke alle thing by conseil, thus sayd he,
And than ne shalt thou not repenten thee.
But though that Salomon spake swiche a word,
Min owen dere brother and my lord,
So wisly God my soule bringe at rest,
I hold your owen conseil is the best.
  For, brother min, take of me this motif,
I have now ben a court-man all my lif,
And God it wot, though I unworthy be,
I have stonden in ful gret degree
Abouten lordes of ful high estat:
Yet had I never with non of hem debat,
I never hem contraried trewely.
I wot wel that my lord can more than I;
What that he saith, I hold it firme and stable,
I say the same, or elles thing semblable.

A ful gret fool is any conseillour,
That serveth any lord of high honour,
That dare presume, or ones thinken it,
That his conseil shuld passe his lordes wit.
Nay, lordes be no fooles by my fay.
Ye han yourselven shewed here to-day
So high sentence, so holily, and wel,
That I consent, and confirme every del
Your wordes all, and your opinioun.
By God ther n'is no man in all this toun
Ne in Itàille, coud bet han ysayd:
Crist holt him of this conseil wel appaid.
And trewely it is an high corage
Of any man that stopen is in age,
To take a young wif, by my fader kin:
Your herte hongeth on a joly pin.
  Doth now in this matere right as you lest,
For finally I hold it for the best.
  Justinus, that ay stille sat and herd,
Right in this wise he to Placebo answerd.
Now, brother min, be patient I pray,
Sin ye han said, and herkneth what I say.
  Senek among his other wordes wise
Saith, that a man ought him right wel avise,
To whom he yeveth his lond or his catel.
And sith I ought avisen me right wel,

To whom I yeve my good away fro me, 9401
Wel more I ought avisen me, parde,
To whom I yeve my body: for alway
I warne you wel it is no childes play
To take a wif without avisement.
Men must enqueren (this is min assent)
Wheder she be wise and sobre, or dronkelewe,
Or proud, or elles other waies a shrew,
A chidester, or a wastour of thy good, 9409
Or riche or poure, or elles a man is wood.
Al be it so, that no man finden shal
Non in this world, that trotteth hol in al,
Ne man, ne beste, swiche as men can devise,
But natheles it ought ynough suffice
With any wif, if so were that she had
Mo goode thewes, than hire vices bad:
And all this axeth leiser to enquere. 9417
For God it wot, I have wept many a tere
Ful prively, sin that I had a wif.
Praise who so wol a wedded mannes lif,
Certain I find in it but cost and care,
And observances of alle blisses bare.
And yet, God wot, my neighebours aboute,
And namely of women many a route,
Sain that I have the moste stedefast wif,
And eke the mekest on that bereth lif. 9426

But I wot best, wher wringeth me my sho. 9427
Ye may for me right as you liketh do.
Aviseth you, ye ben a man of age,
How that ye entren into mariage
And namely with a yong wif and a faire.
By him that made water, fire, erthe, and aire
The yongest man, that is in all this route,
Is besy ynow to bringen it aboute
To han his wif alone, trusteth me: 9435
Ye shul not plesen hire fully yeres three,
This is to sain, to don hire ful plesance.
A wif axeth ful many an observance.
I pray you that ye be not evil appaid.
  Wel, quod this January, and hast thou saide?
Straw for Senek, and straw for thy proverbes,
I counte not a panier ful of herbes
Of scole termes; wiser men than thou, 9443
As thou hast herd, assented here right now
To my purpos: Placebo, what saye ye?
  I say it is a cursed man, quod he,
That letteth matrimoine sikerly.
And with that word they risen sodenly,
And ben assented fully, that he sholde
Be wedded whan him list, and wher he wolde.
  High fantasie and curious besinesse
Fro day to day gan in the soule empresse 9452

Of January about his mariage. 9453
Many a faire shap, and many a faire visage
Ther passeth thurgh his herte night by night.
As who so toke a mirrour polished bright,
And set it in a comune market place,
Than shuld he see many a figure pace
By his mirrour, and in the same wise
Gan January in with his thought devise
Of maidens, which that dwelten him beside: 9461
He wiste not wher that he might abide.
For if that on have beautee in hire face,
Another stont so in the peples grace
For hire sadnesse and hire benignitee,
That of the peple the gretest vois hath she:
And som were riche and hadden a bad name.
But natheles, betwix ernest and game,
He at the last appointed him on on, 9469
And let all other from his herte gon,
And chees hire of his owen auctoritee,
For love is blind all day, and may not see.
And whan that he was in his bed ybrought,
He purtreied in his herte and in his thought
Hire freshe beautee, and hire age tendre,
Hire middel smal, hire armes long and sclendre,
Hire wise governance, hire gentillesse,
Hire womanly bering, and hire sadnesse. 9478

And whan that he on hire was condescended, 9479
Him thought his chois it might not ben amended;
For whan that he himself concluded had,
Him thought eche other mannes wit so bad,
That impossible it were to replie
Again his chois; this was his fantasie.
His frendes sent he to, at his instance,
And praied hem to don him that plesance,
That hastily they wolden to him come; 9487
He wolde abregge hir labour all and some:
Neded no more to hem to go ne ride,
He was appointed ther he wolde abide.
Placebo came, and eke his frendes sone,
And alderfirst he bade hem all a bone,
That non of hem non argumentes make
Again the purpos that he hath ytake:
Which purpos was plesant to God (said he) 9495
And veray ground of his prosperitee.
He said, ther was a maiden in the toun,
Which that of beautee hadde gret renoun,
Al were it so, she were of smal degree,
Sufficeth him hire youth and hire beautee:
Which maid (he said) he wold han to his wif
To lede in ese and holinesse his life:
And thanked God, that he might han hire all,
That no wight with his blisse parten shall: 9504

And praied hem to labour in this nede, 9505
And shapen that he faille not to spede,
For than, he sayd, his spirit was at ese;
Than is (quod he) nothing may me displese,
Save o thing pricketh in my conscience,
The which I wol reherse in your presence.
  I have (quod he) herd said ful yore ago,
Ther may no man han parfite blisses two,
This is to say, in erthe and eke in heven. 9513
For though he kepe him fro the sinnes seven,
And eke from every branch of thilke tree,
Yet is ther so parfit felicitee,
And so gret ese and lust in mariage,
That ever I am agast now in min age,
That I shal leden now so mery a lif,
So delicat, withouten wo or strif,
That I shal han min heven in erthe here. 9521
For sin that veray heven is bought so dere
With tribulation and gret penance,
How shuld I than, living in swiche plesance
As alle wedded men don with hir wives,
Come to the blisse, ther Crist eterne on live is?
This is my drede, and ye, my brethren tweie,
Assoileth me this question I preie.
  Justinus, which that hated his folie,
Answerd anon right in his japerie; 9530

And for he wold his longe tale abrege, 9531
He wolde non auctoritee allege,
But sayde, sire, so ther be non obstacle
Other than this, God of his hie miracle,
And of his mercy may so for you werche,
Ther er ye have your rights of holy cherche,
Ye may repent of wedded mannes lif,
In which ye sain ther is no wo ne strif:
And elles God forbede, but if he sent 9539
A wedded man his grace him to repent
Wel often, rather than a single man.
And therfore, sire, the best rede that I can,
Despeire you not, but haveth in memorie,
Paraventure she may be your purgatorie;
She may be Goddes mene and Goddes whippe;
Than shal your soule up unto heven skippe
Swifter than doth an arow of a bow. 9547
I hope to God hereafter ye shal know,
That ther n'is non so gret felicitee
In mariage, ne never more shal be,
That you shal let of your salavation,
So that ye use, as skill is and reson,
The lustes of your wif attemprely,
And that ye plese hire nat to amorously:
And that ye kepe you eke from other sinne.
My tale is don, for my wit is but thinne. 9556

Beth not agast hereof, my brother dere, 9557
But let us waden out of this matere.
The wif of Bathe, if ye han understond,
Of mariage, which ye now han in hond,
Declared hath ful wel in litel space:
Fareth now wel, God have you in his grace.
 And with this word this Justine and his brother
Han take hir leve, and eche of hem of other.
And whan they saw that it must nedes be, 9565
They wroughten so by sleighte and wise tretee,
That she this maiden, which that Maius hight,
As hastily as ever that she might,
Shal wedded be unto this January.
I trow it were to longe you to tary,
If I you told of every script and bond,
By which that she was feoffed in his lond:
Or for to rekken of hire rich array. 9573
But finally ycomen is the day,
That to the chirche bothe ben they went,
For to receive the holy sacrament.
Forth cometh the preest, with stole about his nekke,
And bade hire be like Sara and Rebekke,
In wisdome and in trouthe of mariage:
And sayd his orisons, as is usage,
And crouched hem, and bade God shuld hem blesse,
And made all siker ynow with holinesse. 9582

Thus ben they wedded with solempnitee; 9583
And at the feste sitteth he and she
With other worthy folk upon the deis.
Al ful of joye and blisse is the paleis,
And ful of instruments, and of vitaille,
The moste deinteous of all Itaille.
Beforn hem stood swiche instruments of soun,
That Orpheus, ne of Thebes Amphion,
Ne maden never swiche a melodie. 9591
At every cours in came loude minstralcie,
That never Joab tromped for to here,
Ne he Theodomas yet half so clere
At Thebes, whan the citee was in doute.
Bacchus the win hem skinketh al aboute,
And Venus laugheth upon every wight,
(For January was become hire knight,
And wolde bothe assaien his corage 9599
In libertee, and eke in mariage)
And with hire firebrond in hire hond aboute
Danceth before the bride and all the route.
And certainly I dare right wel say this,
Ymeneus, that God of wedding is,
Saw never his lif so mery a wedded man.
Hold thou thy pees, thou poet Marcian,
That writest us that ilke weddin mery
Of hire Philologie and him Mercurie, 9608

And of the songes that the Muses songe:
To smal is both thy pen and eke thy tonge
For to descriven of this mariage.
Whan tendre youth hath wedded stouping age,
Ther is swiche mirth that it may not be writen;
Assaieth it yourself, than may ye witen
If that I lie or non in this matere.
Maius, that sit with so benigne a chere,
Hire to behold it semed faerie,
Quene Hester loked never with swiche an eye
On Assuere, so meke a look hath she,
I may you not devise all hire beautee;
But thus moch of hire beautee tell I may,
That she was like the bright morwe of May
Fulfilled of all beautee, and plesance.
This January is ravished in a trance,
At every time he loketh in hire face,
But in his herte he gan hire to manace,
That he that night in armes wold hire streine
Harder than ever Paris did Heleine.
But natheles yet had he gret pitee
That thilke night offenden hire must he,
And thought, alas, o tendre creature,
Now wolde God ye mighten wel endure
All my corage, it is so sharpe and kene:
I am agast ye shal it nat sustene.

But God forbede, that I did all my might.
Now wolde God that it were waxen night,
And that the night wold lasten ever mo.
I wold that all this peple were ago.
And finally he doth all his labour,
As he best mighte, saving his honour,
To haste hem fro the mete in subtil wise.
The time came that reson was to rise,
And after that men dance, and drinken fast,
And spices all about the hous they cast,
And ful of joye and blisse is every man,
All but a squier, that highte Damian,
Which carf beforn the knight ful many a day:
He was so ravisht on his lady May,
That for the veray peine he was nie wood;
Almost he swelt, and swouned ther he stood:
So sore hath Venus hurt him with hire brond,
As that she bare it dancing in hire hond.
And to his bed he went him hastily;
No more of him as at this time speke I;
But ther I let him wepe ynow and plaine,
Til freshe May wol rewen on his peine.
O perilous fire, that in the bedstraw bredeth!
O famuler fo, that his service bedeth!
O servant traitour, false of holy hewe,
Like to the nedder in bosom slie untrewe,

God shelde us alle from your acquaintance! 9661
O January, dronken in plesance
Of mariage, see how thy Damian,
Thin owen squier and thy boren man,
Entendeth for to do thee vilanie:
God grante thee thin homly fo to espie.
For in this world n'is werse pestilence,
Than homly fo, all day in thy presence.
  Parformed hath the sonne his arke diurne, 9669
No longer may the body of him sojourne
On the orisont, as in that latitude:
Night with his mantel, that is derke and rude,
Gan oversprede the Hemisperie aboute:
For which departed is this lusty route
Fro January, with thank on every side.
Home to hir houses lustily they ride,
Ther as they don hir thinges, as hem lest, 9677
And whan they saw hir time gon to rest.
  Sone after that this hastif January
Wol go to bed, he wol no longer tary.
He drinketh Ipocras, clarre, and vernage
Of spices hot, to encresen his corage:
And many a letuarie had he ful fine,
Swiche as the cursed monk dan Constantine
Hath written in his book *de Coitu*;
To ete hem all he wolde nothing eschue: 9686

And to his privee frendes thus sayd he : 9689
  For Goddes love, as sone as it may be,
Let voiden all this hous in curteis wise.
And they han don right as he wol devise.
  Men drinken, and the travers drawe anon ;
The bride is brought a-bed as still as ston ;
And whan the bed was with the preest yblessed,
Out of the chambre hath every wight him dressed,
And January hath fast in armes take 9695
His freshe May, his paradis, his make.
He lulleth hire, he kisseth hire ful oft ;
With thicke bristles of his berd unsoft,
Like to the skin of houndfish, sharp as brere,
(For he was shave al newe in his manere)
He rubbeth hire upon hire tendre face,
And sayde thus ; Alas ! I mote trespace
To you, my spouse, and you gretly offend, 9703
Or time come that I wol doun descend.
But natheles considereth this, (quod he)
Ther n'is no werkman, whatsoever he be,
That may both werken wel and hastily :
This wil be don at leiser parfitly.
It is no force how longe that we play ;
In trewe wedlok coupled be we tway ;
And blessed be the yoke that we ben inne,
For in our actes may ther be no sinne. 9712

A man may do no sin with his wif, 9713
Ne hurt himselven with his owen knif:
For we have leve to play us by the lawe.
  Thus laboureth he, til that the day gan dawe,
And than he taketh a sop in fine clarre,
And upright in his bed than sitteth he.
And after that he sang ful loud and clere,
And kist his wif, and maketh wanton chere.
He was al coltish, ful of ragerie, 9721
And ful of jergon, as a flecked pie.
The slacke skin about his necke shaketh,
While that he sang, so chanteth he and craketh.
But God wot what that May thought in hire herte,
Whan she him saw up sitting in his sherte
In his night cap, and with his necke lene:
She praiseth not his playing worth a bene.
Than sayd he thus; my reste wol I take 9729
Now day is come, I may no lenger wake;
And doun he layd his hed and slept til prime.
And afterward, whan that he saw his time,
Up riseth January, but freshe May
Held hire in chambre til the fourthe day,
As usage is of wives for the beste.
For every labour somtime moste han reste,
Or elles longe may he not endure;
This is to say, no lives creature, 9738

Be it of fish, or brid, or best, or man. 9739
Now wol I speke of woful Damian,
That langureth for love, as ye shul here;
Therfore I speke to him in this manere.
I say, O sely Damian, alas!
Answer to this demand, as in this cas,
How shalt thou to thy lady freshe May
Tellen thy wo? She wol alway say nay;
Eke if thou speke, she wol thy wo bewrein; 9747
God be thin help, I can no better sein.
This sike Damian in Venus fire
So brenneth, that he dieth for desire;
For which he put his lif in aventure,
No lenger might he in this wise endure,
But prively a penner gan he borwe,
And in a lettre wrote he all his sorwe,
In manere of a complaint or a lay, 9755
Unto his faire freshe lady May.
And in a purse of silk, heng on his sherte,
He hath it put, and layd it at his herte.
The mone that at none was thilke day
That January hath wedded freshe May
In ten of Taure, was into Cancer gliden;
So long hath Maius in hire chambre abiden,
As custome is unto thise nobles alle.
A bride shal not eten in the halle, 9764

Til dayes four or three dayes at the leste
Ypassed ben, that let hire go to feste.
The fourthe day complete fro none to none,
Whan that the highe messe was ydone,
In halle sat this January and May,
As fresh as is the brighte somers day.
And so befel, how that this goode man
Remembred him upon this Damian,
And sayde; Seinte Marie, how may it be,
That Damian entendeth not to me?
Is he ay sike? or how may this betide?
His squiers, which that stoden ther beside,
Excused him, because of his siknesse,
Which letted him to don his besinesse:
Non other cause mighte make him tary.
That me forthinketh, quod this January;
He is a gentil squier by my trouthe,
If that he died, it were gret harme and routhe.
He is as wise, discret, and as secree,
As any man I wote of his degree,
And therto manly and eke servisable,
And for to ben a thrifty man right able.
But after mete as sone as ever I may
I wol myselfe visite him, and eke May,
To don him all the comfort that I can.
And for that word him blessed every man,

That of his bountee and his gentillesse 9791
He wolde so comforten in siknesse
His squier, for it was a gentil dede.
Dame, quod this January, take good hede,
At after mete, ye with your women alle,
(Whan that ye ben in chambre out of this halle)
That all ye gon to see this Damian:
Doth him disport, he is a gentil man,
And telleth him that I wol him visite, 9799
Have I no thing but rested me a lite:
And spede you faste, for I wol abide
Til that ye slepen faste by my side.
And with that word he gan unto him calle
A squier, that was marshal of his halle,
And told him certain thinges that he wolde.
This freshe May hath streight hire way yholde
With all hire women unto Damian. 9807
Doun by his beddes side sit she than,
Comforting him as goodly as she may.
This Damian, whan that his time he say,
In secree wise, his purse, and eke his bill,
In which that he ywritten had his will,
Hath put into hire hond withouten more,
Save that he siked wonder depe and sore,
And softely to hire right thus sayd he;
Mercie, and that ye nat discover me: 9816

For I am ded, if that this thing be kid. 9817
 This purse hath she in with hire bosome hid,
And went hire way; ye get no more of me;
But unto January ycome is she,
That on his beddes side sate ful soft.
He taketh hire, and kisseth hire ful oft:
And layd him doun to slepe, and that anon.
She feined hire, as that she muste gon
Ther as ye wote that every wight mot nede; 9825
And whan she of this bill hath taken hede,
She rent it all to cloutes at the last,
And in the privee softely it cast.
 Who studieth now but faire freshe May?
Adoun by olde January she lay,
That slepte, til the cough hath him awaked:
Anon he prayd hire stripen hire al naked,
He wolde of hire, he said, have som plesance; 9833
And said, hire clothes did him encombrance.
And she obeith him, be hire lefe or loth.
But lest that precious folk be with me wroth,
How that he wrought, I dare nat to you tell,
Or wheder hire thought it paradis or hell;
But ther I let hem wirken in hir wise
Til evesong rang, and that they must arise.
 Were it by destinee, or aventure,
Were it by influence, or by nature, 9842

Or constellation, that in swiche estat
The heven stood at that time fortunat,
As for to put a bill of Venus werkes
(For alle thing hath time, as sayn thise clerkes)
To any woman for to get hire love,
I cannot say, but grete God above,
That knoweth that non act is causeles,
He deme of all, for I wol hold my pees.
But soth is this, how that this freshe May
Hath taken swiche impression that day
Of pitee on this sike Damian,
That fro hire herte she ne driven can
The remembrance for to don him ese.
Certain (thought she) whom that this thing displese
I rekke not, for here I him assure,
To love him best of any creature,
Though he no more hadde than his sherte.
  Lo, pitee renneth sone in gentil herte.
Here may ye seen, how excellent franchise
In women is whan they hem narwe avise.
Som tyraunt is, as ther ben many on,
That hath an herte as hard as any ston.
Which wold han lette him sterven in the place
Wel rather than han granted him hire grace:
And hem rejoycen in hir cruel pride,
And rekken not to ben an homicide.

This gentil May, fulfilled of pitee, 9869
Right of hire hond a lettre maketh she,
In which she granteth him hire veray grace ;
Ther lacked nought, but only day and place,
Wher that she might unto his lust suffice :
For it shal be, right as he wol devise.
And whan she saw hire time upon a day
To visiten this Damian goth this May,
And sotilly this lettre doun she threst 9877
Under his pilwe, rede it if him lest.
She taketh him by the hond, and hard him twist
So secretly, that no wight of it wist,
And bade him ben all hol, and forth she went
To January, whan he for hire sent.
Up riseth Damian the nexte morwe,
Al passed was his siknesse and his sorwe.
He kembeth him, he proineth him and piketh, 9885
He doth all that his lady lust and liketh;
And eke to January he goth as lowe,
As ever did a dogge for the bowe.
He is so plesant unto every man,
(For craft is all, who so that don it can)
That every wight is fain to speke him good ;
And fully in his ladies grace he stood.
Thus let I Damian about his nede,
And in my tale forth I wol procede. 9894

Som clerkes holden that felicitee
Stant in delit, and therfore certain he
This noble January, with all his might
In honest wise as longeth to a knight,
Shope him to liven ful deliciously.
His housing, his array, as honestly
To his degree was maked as a kinges.
Amonges other of his honest thinges
He had a gardin walled all with ston,
So fayre a gardin wote I no wher non.
For out of doute I veraily suppose,
That he that wrote the Romant of the Rose,
Ne coude of it the beautee wel devise:
Ne Priapus ne mighte not suffise,
Though he be god of gardins, for to tell
The beautee of the gardin, and the well,
That stood under a laurer alway grene.
Ful often time he Pluto and his quene
Proserpina, and alle hir faerie,
Disporten hem and maken melodie
About that well, and daunced, as men told.
This noble knight, this January the old
Swiche deintee hath in it to walke and pley,
That he wol suffre no wight bere the key,
Sauf he himself for of the smal wiket
He bare alway of silver a cliket,

With which whan that him list he it unshette. 9921
And whan that he wold pay his wives dette
In somer seson thider wold he go,
And May his wif, and no wight but they two;
And thinges which that wère not don a-bedde,
He in the gardin parfourmed hem and spedde.
  And in this wise many a mery day
Lived this January and freshe May,
But worldly joye may not alway endure 9929
To January, ne to no creature.
  O soden hap, o thou fortune unstable,
Like to the Scorpion so deceivable,
That flatrest with thy hed whan thou wolt sting;
Thy tayl is deth, thurgh thin enveniming.
O brotel joye, o swete poyson queinte,
O monstre, that so sotilly canst peinte
Thy giftes, under hewe of stedfastnesse, 9937
That thou deceivest bothe more and lesse,
Why hast thou January thus deceived,
That haddest him for thy ful frend received?
And now thou hast beraft him both his eyen,
For sorwe of which desireth he to dyen.
  Alas! this noble January free,
Amidde his lust and his prosperitee
Is waxen blind, and that al sodenly.
He wepeth and he waileth pitously; 9946

And therwithall, the fire of jalousie 9947
(Lest that his wif shuld fall in som folie)
So brent his herte, that he wolde fain,
That som man had both him and hire yslain;
For nother after his deth, ne in his lif,
Ne wold he that she were no love ne wif,
But ever live as a widewe in clothes blake,
Sole as the turtle that hath lost hire make.
But at the last, after a moneth or tway 9955
His sorwe gan asswagen, soth to say.
For whan he wist it might non other be,
He patiently toke his adversitee:
Save out of doute he ne may nat forgon,
That he n'as jalous ever more in on:
Which jalousie it was so outrageous,
That neither in halle, ne in non other hous,
Ne in non other place never the mo 9963
He n'olde suffre hire for to ride or go,
But if that he had honde on hire alway.
For which ful often wepeth freshe May,
That loveth Damian so brenningly,
That she moste either dien sodenly,
Or elles she moste han him as hire lest:
She waited whan hire herte wold to-brest.
  Upon that other side Damian
Becomen is the sorwefullest man 9972

That ever was, for neither night ne day 9973
Ne might he speke a word to freshe May,
As to his purpos of no swiche matere,
But if that January must it here,
That had an hand upon hire evermo.
But natheles, by writing to and fro,
And privee signes, wist he what she ment,
And she knew eke the fin of his entent.
O January, what might it thee availe, 9981
Though thou might seen, as fer as shippes saile?
For as good is blind to deceived be,
As be deceived, whan a man may see.
Lo Argus, which that had an hundred eyen,
For all that ever he coude pore or prien,
Yet was he blent, and, God wot, so ben mo,
That wenen wisly that it be not so:
Passe over is an ese, I say no more. 9989
This freshe May, of which I spake of yore,
In warm wex hath enprented the cliket,
That January bare of the smal wiket,
By which into his garden oft he went;
And Damian that knew all hire entent
The cliket contrefeted prively;
Ther n'is no more to say, but hastily
Som wonder by this cliket shal betide,
Which ye shul heren, if ye wol abide. 9998

O noble Ovide, soth sayest thou, God wote,
What sleight is it if love be long and hote,
That he n'ill find it out in som manere?
By Pyramus and Thisbe may men lere;
Though they were kept ful long and streit over all,
They ben accorded, rowning thurgh a wall,
Ther no wight coude han founden swiche a sleighte
But now to purpos; er that daies eighte
Were passed of the month of Juil, befill,
That January hath caught so gret a will,
Thurgh egging of his wif, him for to play
In his gardin, and no wight but they tway,
That in a morwe unto this May said he;
Rise up, my wif, my love, my lady free;
The turtles vois is herd, myn owen swete;
The winter is gon, with all his raines wete.
Come forth now with thin eyen columbine.
Wel fairer ben thy brests than ony wine.
The gardin is enclosed all aboute;
Come forth, my white spouse, for out of doute,
Thou hast me wounded in myn herte, o wif:
No spot in thee n'as never in all thy lif.
Come forth, and let us taken our disport,
I chese thee for my wif and my comfort.
Swiche olde lewed wordes used he.
On Damian a signe made she,

That he shuld go before with his cliket.
This Damian hath opened the wiket,
And in he stert, and that in swiche manere,
That no wight might him see neyther yhere,
And still he sit under a bush. Anon
This January, as blind as is a ston,
With Maius in his hand, and no wight mo,
Into this freshe gardin is ago,
And clapped to the wiket sodenly.
  Now, wif, quod he, here n'is but thou, and I,
That art the creature that I best love:
For by that lord that sit in heven above,
I hadde lever dien on a knif,
Than thee offenden, dere trewe wif.
For Goddes sake, thinke how I thee chees,
Not for no covetise douteles,
But only for the love I had to thee.
And though that I be old and may not see,
Beth to me trewe, and I wol tell you why;
Certes three thinges shal ye win therby;
First love of Crist, and to yourself honour,
And all min heritage, toun and tour.
I yeve it you, maketh chartres as you lest:
This shal be don to-morwe er sonne rest,
So wisly God my soule bring to blisse;
I pray you on this covenant ye me kisse.

And though that I be jalous, wite me nought; 10051
Ye ben so depe enprented in my thought,
That whan that I consider your beautee,
And therwithall the unlikely elde of me,
I may not certes, though I shulde die,
Forbere to ben out of your compagnie
For veray love; this is withouten doute:
Now kisse me, wif, and let us rome aboute.

This freshe May, whan she thise wordes herd, 10059
Benignely to January answerd,
But first and forward she began to wepe:
I have, quod she, a soule for to kepe
As wel as ye, and also min honour,
And of my wifhood thilke tendre flour,
Which that I have assured in your hond,
Whan that the preest to you my body bond:
Wherfore I wol answere in this manere, 10067
With leve of you, myn owen lord so dere.

I pray to God that never daw that day,
That I ne sterve, as foule as woman may,
If ever I do unto my kin that shame,
Or elles I empeire so my name,
That I be false; and if I do that lakke,
Do stripen me and put me in a sakke,
And in the nexte river do me drenche:
I am a gentil woman, and no wenche. 10076

Why speke ye thus ? but men ben ever untrewe, 10077
And women han reprefe of you ay newe.
Ye con non other daliance, I leve,
But speke to us as of untrust and repreve.
  And with that word she saw wher Damian
Sat in the bush, and coughen she began ;
And with hire finger a signe made she,
That Damian shuld climbe up on a tre,
That charged was with fruit, and up he went : 10085
For veraily he knew all hire entent,
And every signe that she coude make,
Wel bet than January hire owen make.
For in a lettre she had told him all
Of this matere, how that he werken shall.
And thus I let him sitting in the pery,
And January and May roming ful mery.
  Bright was the day, and blew the firmament ; 10093
Phebus of gold his stremes doun hath sent
To gladen every flour with his warmnesse ;
He was that time in *Geminis*, I gesse,
But litel fro his declination
Of Cancer, Joves exaltation.
And so befell in that bright morwe tide,
That in the gardin, on the ferther side,
Pluto, that is the king of Faerie,
And many a ladie in his compagnie 10102

Folwing his wif, the quene Proserpina, 10103
Which that he ravished out of Ethna,
While that she gadred floures in the mede,
(In Claudian ye may the story rede,
How that hire in his grisely carte he fette)
This king of Faerie adoun him sette
Upon a benche of turves freshe and grene,
And right anon thus said he to his quene.
My wif, quod he, ther may no wight say nay, 10111
The experience so preveth it every day,
The treson which that woman doth to man.
Ten hundred thousand stories tell I can
Notable of your untrouth and brotelnesse.
O Salomon, richest of all richesse,
Fulfilled of sapience, and worldly glorie,
Ful worthy ben thy wordes to memorie
To every wight, that wit and reson can. 10119
Thus praiseth he the bountee yet of man;
Among a thousand men yet fond I on,
But of all women fond I never non.
Thus saith this king, that knewe your wikkednesse;
And Jesus, *Filius* Sirach, as I gesse,
He speketh of you but selden reverence.
A wilde fire, a corrupt pestilence,
So fall upon your bodies yet to-night:
Ne see ye not this honourable knight? 10128

Because, alas! that he is blind and old,
His owen man shal make him cokewold.
Lo, wher he sit, the lechour, in the tree.
Now wol I graunten of my majestee
Unto this olde blinde worthy knight,
That he shal have again his eyen sight,
Whan that his wif wol don him vilanie;
Than shal he knowen all hire harlotrie,
Both in reprefe of hire and other mo.
  Ye, sire, quod Proserpine, and wol ye so?
Now by my modre Ceres soule I swere,
That I shal yeve hire suffisant answere,
And alle women after for hire sake;
That though they ben in any gilt ytake,
With face bold they shul hemselve excuse,
And bere hem doun that wolden hem accuse.
For lacke of answere, non of us shul dien.
Al had ye seen a thing with bothe youre eyen,
Yet shul we so visage it hardely,
And wepe and swere and chiden subtilly,
That ye shul ben as lewed as ben gees.
  What rekketh me of your auctoritees?
I wote wel that this Jewe, this Salomon,
Fond of us women fooles many on:
But though that he ne fond no good woman,
Ther hath yfonden many an other man

Women ful good, and trewe, and vertuous;
Witnesse on hem that dwelte in Cristes hous,
With martyrdom they preved hir constance.
The Romain gestes maken remembrance
Of many a veray trewe wif also.
But, sire, ne be not wroth, al be it so,
Though that he said he fond no good woman,
I pray you take the sentence of the man:
He ment thus, That in soverain bountee
N'is non but God, no, nouther he ne she.
  Ey, for the veray God that n'is but on,
What maken ye so moche of Salomon?
What though he made a temple, Goddes hous?
What though he were riche and glorious?
So made he eke a temple of false goddes,
How might he don a thing that more forbode is?
Parde as faire as ye his name emplastre,
He was a lechour, and an idolastre,
And in his elde he veray God forsoke.
And if that God ne hadde (as saith the boke)
Spared him for his fathers sake, he sholde
Han lost his regne rather than he wolde.
  I sete nat of all the vilanie,
That he of women wrote, a boterflie.
I am a woman, nedes moste I speke,
Or swell unto that time min herte breke.

For sin he said that we ben jangleresses,
As ever mote I brouken hole my tresses,
I shal nat sparen for no curtesie
To speke him harm, that sayth us vilanie.
  Dame, quod this Pluto, be no lenger wroth,
I yeve it up : but sin I swore min oth,
That I wold graunten him his sight again,
My word shal stand, that warne I you certain :
I am a king, it sit me not to lie.
And I, quod she, am quene of Faerie.
Hire answere she shal han I undertake,
Let us no more wordes of it make.
Forsoth, quod he, I wol you not contrary
  Now let us turne again to January,
That in the gardin with his faire May
Singeth wel merier than the popingay :
You love I best, and shal, and other non.
  So long about the alleyes is he gon,
Til he was comen again to thilke pery.
Wher as this Damian sitteth ful mery
On high among the freshe leves grene.
  This freshe May, that is so bright and shene,
Gan for to sike, and said ; alas my side !
Now, sire, quod she, for ought that may betide
I most have of the peres that I see,
Or I moste die, so sore longeth me

To eten of the smale peres grene: 10207
Help for hire love that is of heven quene.
I tell you wel a woman in my plit
May have to fruit so gret an appetit,
That she may dien, but she of it have.
  Alas! quod he, that I n'adde here a knave,
That coude climbe, alas! alas! (quod he)
For I am blinde. Ye, sire, no force, quod she;
But wold ye vouchesauf for Goddes sake, 10215
The pery in with your armes for to take,
(For wel I wot that ye mistrusten me)
Than wold I climben wel ynough, (quod she)
So I my fote might setten on your back.
  Certes, said he, therin shal be no lack,
Might I you helpen mith min herte blood.
  He stoupeth doun, and on his back she stood,
And caught hire by a twist, and up she goth. 10223
(Ladies, I pray you that ye be not wroth,
I can nat glose, I am a rude man:)
And sodenly anon this Damian
Gan pullen up the smock, and in he throng.
  And whan that Pluto saw this grete wrong,
To January he yaf again his sight,
And made him see as wel as ever he might.
And whan he thus had caught his sight again,
Ne was ther never man of thing so fain: 10232

But on his wif his thought was ever mo.
Up to the tree he cast his eyen two,
And saw how Damian his wife had dressed
In swiche manere, it may not ben expressed,
But if I wolde speke uncurteisly.
And up he yaf a roring and a cry,
As doth the mother whan the child shal die;
Out! helpe! alas! harow! he gan to cry;
O stronge lady store, what doest thou?
And she answered: sire, what aileth you?
Have patience and reson in your minde,
I have you holpen on both your eyen blinde.
Up peril of my soule, I shal nat lien,
As me was taught to helpen with your eyen,
Was nothing better for to make you see,
Than strogle with a man upon a tree:
God wot, I did it in ful good entent.
Strogle! quod he, ye, algate in it went.
God yeve you both on shames deth to dien,
He swived thee, I saw it with min eyen,
And elles be I honged by the halse.
Than is, quod she, my medicine al false.
For certainly, if that ye mighten see,
Ye wold not say thise wordes unto me.
Ye have som glimsing, and no parfit sight.
I see, quod he, as wel as ever I might,

(Thanked be God) with both min eyen two, 10259
And by my feith me thought he did thee so.
  Ye mase, ye masen, goode sire, quod she;
This thank have I for I have made you see:
Alas! quod she, that ever I was so kind.
  Now, dame, quod he, let al passe out of mind:
Come doun, my lefe, and if I have missaid,
God helpe me so, as I am evil appaid.
But by my fadres soule, I wende have sein, 10267
How that this Damian had by thee lein,
And that thy smock had lein upon his brest.
  Ye, sire, quod she, ye may wene as you lest:
But, sire, a man that waketh of his slepe,
He may not sodenly wel taken kepe
Upon a thing, ne seen it parfitly,
Til that he be adawed veraily.
Right so a man, that long hath blind ybe, 10275
He may not sodenly so wel ysee;
First whan his sight is newe comen agein,
As he that hath a day or two ysein.
Til that your sight ysateled be a while,
Ther may ful many a sighte you begile.
Beware, I pray you, for by heven king
Ful many a man weneth to see a thing,
And it is all another than it semeth:
He which that misconceiveth oft misdemeth. 10284

And with that word she lep doun fro the tree. 10285
This January who is glad but he?
He kisseth hire, and clippeth hire ful oft,
And on hire wombe he stroketh hire ful soft;
And to his paleis home he hath hire lad.
Now, goode men, I pray you to be glad.
Thus endeth here my tale of Januarie,
God blesse us, and his moder Seinte Marie. 10292

THE SQUIERES PROLOGUE.

By Goddes mercy, sayde oure Hoste tho,
Now swiche a wif I preie God kepe me fro.
Lo, swiche sleightes and subtilitees
In women ben; for ay as besy as bees
Ben they us sely men for to deceive, 10297
And from a sothe wol they ever weive.
By this Marchantes it preveth wel.
But natheles, as trewe as any stele,
I have a wif, though that she poure be;
But of hire tonge a labbing shrewe is she;
And yet she hath an hepe of vices mo.
Therof no force; let all swiche thinges go.
But wete ye what? in conseil be it seyde,
Me reweth sore I am unto hire teyde; 10306

For and I shulde rekene every vice,
Which that she hath, ywis I were to nice;
And cause why, it shulde reported be
And told to hire of som of this compagnie,
(Of whom it nedeth not for to declare,
Sin women connen utter swiche chaffare)
And eke my wit sufficeth not therto
To tellen all; wherfore my tale is do.
 Squier, come ner, if it youre wille be,
And say somwhat of love, for certes ye
Connen theron as moche as any man.
Nay, sire, quod he, but swiche thing as I can
With hertly wille, for I wol not rebelle
Agein youre lust, a tale wol I telle.
Have me excused if I speke amis;
My wille is good; and lo, my tale is this.

THE SQUIERES TALE.

At Sarra, in the lond of Tartarie,
Ther dwelt a king that werreied Russie,
Thurgh which ther died many a doughty man:
This noble king was cleped Cambuscan,
Which in his time was of so gret renoun,
That ther n'as no wher in no regioun

So excellent a lord in alle thing:
Him lacked nought that longeth to a king,
As of the secte of which that he was borne.
He kept his lay to which he was ysworne,
And therto he was hardy, wise, and riche,
And pitous and just, and alway yliche;
Trewe of his word, benigne and honourable;
Of his corage as any centre stable;
Yong, fresh, and strong, in armes desirous,
As any bacheler of all his hous.
A faire person he was, and fortunate
And kept alway so wel real estat,
That ther n'as no wher swiche another man.
  This noble king, this Tartre Cambuscan,
Hadde two sones by Elfeta his wif,
Of which the eldest sone highte Algarsif,
That other was ycleped Camballo.
  A doughter had this worthy king also,
That yongest was, and highte Canace:
But for to tellen you all hire beautee,
It lith not in my tonge, ne in my conning,
I dare not undertake so high a thing:
Min English eke is unsufficient,
It muste ben a Rethor excellent,
That coude his colours longing for that art,
If he shuld hire descriven ony part:

I am non swiche, I mote speke as I can.
And so befell, that whan this Cambuscan
Hath twenty winter borne his diademe,
As he was wont fro yere to yere I deme,
He let the feste of his nativitee
Don crien, thurghout Sarra his citee,
The last Idus of March, after the yere.
Phebus the sonne ful jolif was and clere,
For he was nigh his exaltation
In Martes face, and in his mansion
In Aries, the colerike hote signe:
Ful lusty was the wether and benigne,
For which the foules again the sonne shene,
What for the seson ane the yonge grene,
Ful loude songen hir affections:
Hem semed han getten hem protections
Again the swerd of winter kene and cold.
This Cambuscan, of which I have you told,
In real vestiments, sit on his deis
With diademe, ful high in his paleis;
And holt his feste so solempne and so riche,
That in this world ne was ther non it liche.
Of which if I shal tellen all the array,
Than wold it occupie a somers day;
And eke it nedeth not for to devise
At every cours the order of hir service.

I wol not tellen of hir strange sewes, 10381
Ne of hir swannes, ne hir heronsewes.
Eke in that lond, as tellen knightes old,
Ther is som mete that is ful deintee hold,
That in this lond men recche of it ful smal:
Ther n'is no man that may reporten al.
I wol not tarien you, for it is prime,
And for it is no fruit, but losse of time,
Unto my purpose I wol have recours. 10389
And so befell that after the thridde cours
While that this king sit thus in his nobley,
Herking his ministralles hir thinges pley
Beforne him at his bord deliciously,
In at the halle dore al sodenly
Ther came a knight upon a stede of bras,
And in his hond a brod mirrour of glas;
Upon his thombe he had of gold a ring, 10397
And by his side a naked swerd hanging:
And up he rideth to the highe bord.
In all the halle ne was ther spoke a word,
For mervaille of this knight; him to behold
Ful besily they waiten yong and old.
This strange knight that come thus sodenly
Al armed save his hed ful richely,
Salueth king and quene, and lordes alle
By order, as they saten in the halle, 10406

With so high reverence and observance,
As wel in speche as in his contenance,
That Gawain with his olde curtesie,
Though he were com agen out of faerie,
Ne coude him not amenden with a word.
And after this, beforn the highe bord
He with a manly vois sayd his message,
After the forme used in his langage,
Withouten vice of sillable or of letter.
And for his tale shuld seme the better,
Accordant to his wordes was his chere,
As techeth art of speche hem that it lere.
Al be it that I cannot soune his stile,
Ne cannot climben over so high a stile,
Yet say I this, as to comun entent,
Thus much amounteth all that ever he ment,
If it so be that I have it in mind.
  He sayd; The king of Arabie and of Inde,
My liege lord, on this solempne day
Salueth you as he best can and may,
And sendeth you in honour of your feste
By me, that am al redy at your heste,
This stede of bras, that esily and wel
Can in the space of a day naturel,
(This is to sayn, in four and twenty houres)
Wher so you list, in drought or elles shoures,

Beren your body into every place, 10433
To which your herte willeth for to pace,
Withouten wemme of you, thurgh foule or faire.
Or if you list to fleen as high in the aire,
As doth an egle, whan him list to sore,
This same stede shal bere you evermore
Withouten harme, till ye be ther you lest,
(Though that ye slepen on his back or rest)
And turne again, with writhing of a pin. 10441
He that it wrought, he coude many a gin;
He waited many a constellation,
Or he had don this operation,
And knew ful many a sele and many a bond.
This mirrour eke, that I have in min hond,
Hath swiche a might, that men may in it see,
Whan ther shal falle ony adversitee
Unto your regne, or to yourself also, 10449
And openly, who is your frend or fo.
And over all this, if any lady bright
Hath set hire herte on any maner wight,
If he be false, she shal his treson see,
His newe love, and all his subtiltee
So openly, that ther shal nothing hide.
Wherfore again this lusty somer tide
This mirrour and this ring, that ye may se,
He hath sent to my lady Canace, 10458

Your excellente doughter that is here. 10459
  The vertue of this ring, if ye wol here,
Is this, that if hire list it for to were
Upon hire thombe, or in hire purse it bere,
Ther is no foule that fleeth under heven,
That she ne shal wel understond his steven,
And know his mening openly and plaine,
And answere him in his langage again:
And every gras that groweth upon rote 10467
She shal eke know, and whom it wol do bote,
All be his woundes never so depe and wide.
  This naked swerd, that hangeth by my side,
Swiche vertue hath, that what man that it smite,
Thurghout his armure it wol kerve and bite,
Were it as thicke as is a braunched oke:
And what man that is wounded with the stroke
Shal never be hole, til that you list of grace 10475
To stroken him with the platte in thilke place
Ther he is hurt; this is as much to sain,
Ye moten with the platte swerd again
Stroken him in the wound, and it wol close.
This is the veray soth withouten glose,
It failleth not, while it is in your hold.
  And whan this knight hath thus his tale told,
He rideth out of halle, and doun he light:
His stede, which that shone as sonne bright, 10484

Stant in the court as stille as any ston.
This knight is to his chambre ladde anon,
And is unarmed, and to the mete ysette.
Thise presents ben ful richelich yfette,
This is to sain, the swerd and the mirrour,
And borne anon into the highe tour,
With certain officers ordained therfore;
And unto Canace the ring is bore
Solempnely, ther she sat at the table;
But sikerly, withouten any fable,
The hors of bras, that may not be remued;
It stant, as it were to the ground yglued;
Ther may no man out of the place it drive
For non engine, of windas, or polive:
And cause why, for they con not the craft,
And therfore in the place they han it laft,
Til that the knight hath taught hem the manere
To voiden him as ye shal after here.
 Gret was the prees, that swarmed to and fro
To gauren on this hors that stondeth so:
For it so high was, and so brod and long,
So wel proportioned for to be strong,
Right as it were a stede of Lumbardie;
Therwith so horsly, and so quik of eye,
As it a gentil Poileis courser were:
For certes, fro his tayl unto his ere

Nature ne art ne coud him not amend 10511
In no degree, as all the peple wend.
But evermore hir moste wonder was,
How that it coude gon, and was of bras;
It was of faerie, as the peple semed.
Diverse folk diversely han demed;
As many heds, as many wittes ben.
They murmured, as doth a swarme of been,
And maden skilles after hir fantasies, 10519
Rehersing of the olde poetries,
And sayd it was ylike the Pegasee,
The hors that hadde winges for to flee,
Or elles it was the Grekes hors Sinon,
That broughte Troye to destruction,
As men moun in thise olde gestes rede.
Min herte (quod on) is evermore in drede,
I trow som men of armes ben therin, 10527
That shapen hem this citee for to win:
It were right good that al swiche thing were know
Another rowned to his felaw low,
And sayd, He lieth, for it is rather like
An apparence ymade by som magike,
As jogelours plaien at thise festes grete.
Of sondry doutes thus they jangle and trete,
As lewed peple demen comunly
Of thinges, that ben made more subtilly, 10536

Than they can in hir lewednesse comprehende, 10537
They demen gladly to the badder ende.
  And som of hem wondred on the mirrour,
That born was up in to the maister tour,
How men mighte in it swiche thinges see.
  Another answerd, and sayd, it might wel be
Naturelly by compositions
Of angles, and of slie reflections;
And saide that in Rome was swiche on. 10545
They speke of Alhazen and Vitellon,
And Aristotle, that writen in hir lives
Of queinte mirrours, and of prospectives,
As knowen they, that han hir bookes herd.
  And other folk han wondred on the swerd,
That wolde percen thurghout every thing:
And fell in speche of Telephus the king,
And of Achilles for his queinte spere, 10553
For he coude with it bothe hele and dere,
Right in swiche wise as men may with the swerd,
Of which right now ye have yourselven herd.
They speken of sondry harding of metall,
And speken of medicines therwithall,
And how, and whan it shuld yharded be,
Which is unknow algates unto me.
  Tho speken they of Canacees ring,
And saiden all, that swiche a wonder thing 10562

Of craft of ringes herd they never non,
Save that he Moises and king Salomon
Hadden a name of conning in swiche art.
Thus sain the peple, and drawen hem apart.
But natheles som saiden that it was
Wonder to maken of ferne ashen glas,
And yet is glas nought like ashen of ferne,
But for they han yknowen it so ferne,
Therfore ceseth hir jangling and hir wonder.
As sore wondren som on cause of thonder,
On ebbe and floud, on gossomer, and on mist,
And on all thing, til that the cause is wist.
Thus janglen they, and demen and devise,
Til that the king gan fro his bord arise.
Phebus hath left the angle meridional,
And yet ascending was the beste real,
The gentil Leon, with his Aldrian,
Whan that this Tartre king, this Cambuscan,
Rose from his bord, ther as he sat ful hie:
Beforne him goth the loude minstralcie,
Til he come to his chambre of paraments,
Ther as they sounden divers instruments,
That it is like an heven for to here.
Now dauncen lusty Venus children dere:
For in the fish hir lady sat ful hie,
And loketh on hem with a frendly eye.

This noble king is set upon his trone;
This straunge knight is fet to him ful sone,
And on the daunce he goth with Canace.
Here is the revell and the jolitee,
That is not able a dull man to devise:
He must han knowen love and his servise,
And ben festlich man, as fresh as May,
That shulde you devisen swiche array.
Who coude tellen you the forme of daunces
So uncouth, and so freshe contenaunces,
Swiche subtil lokings and dissimulings,
For dred of jalous mennes apperceivings?
No man but Launcelot, and he is ded.
Therfore I passe over all this lustyhed,
I say no more, but in this jolinesse
I lete hem, til men to the souper hem dresse.
The steward bit the spices for to hie
And eke the win, in all this melodie;
The ushers and the squierie ben gon,
The spices and the win is come anon:
They ete and drinke, and whan this had an end,
Unto the temple, as reson was, they wend:
The service don, they soupen all by day.
What nedeth you rehersen hir array?
Eche man wot wel, that at a kinges fest
Is plentee, to the most and to the lest,

And deintees mo than ben in my knowing.
At after souper goth this noble king
To seen this hors of bras, with all a route
Of lordes and of ladies him aboute.
Swiche wondring was ther on this hors of bras,
That sin the gret assege of Troye was,
Ther as men wondred on an hors also,
Ne was ther swiche a wondring, as was tho.
But finally the king asketh the knight
The vertue of this courser, and the might,
And praid him to tell his governaunce.
This hors anon gan for trip and daunce,
Whan that the knight laid hond up on his rein,
And saide, sire, ther n'is no more to sain,
But whan you list to riden any where,
Ye moten trill a pin, stant in his ere,
Which I shal tellen you betwixt us two,
Ye moten nempne him to what place also,
Or to what contree that you list to ride.
And whan ye come ther as you list abide,
Bid him descend, and trill another pin,
(For therin lieth the effect of all the gin)
And he wol doun descend and don your will,
And in that place he wol abiden still:
Though all the world had the contrary swore,
He shal not thennes be drawe ne be bore.

Or if you list to bid him thennes gon, 10641
Trille this pin, and he wol vanish anon
Out of the sight of every maner wight,
And come agen, be it by day or night,
Whan that you list to clepen him again
In swiche a guise, as I shal to you sain
Betwixen you and me, and that ful sone.
Ride whan you list, ther n'is no more to done.
Enfourmed whan the king was of the knight, 10649
And hath conceived in his wit aright
The maner and the forme of all this thing,
Ful glad and blith, this noble doughty king
Repaireth to his revel, as beforne.
The bridel is in to the tour yborne,
And kept among his jewels lefe and dere:
The hors vanisht, I n'ot in what manere,
Out of hir sight, ye get no more of me: 10657
But thus I lete in lust and jolitee
This Cambuscan his lordes festeying,
Til that wel nigh the day began to spring.

Pars secunda.

The norice of digestion, the slepe,
Gan on hem winke, and bad hem taken kepe,
That mochel drinke, and labour wol have rest:
And with a galping mouth hem all he kest, 10664

And said, that it was time to lie adoun, 10665
For blood was in his dominatioun:
Cherisheth blood, natures frend, quod he.
  They thanken him galping, by two by three;
And every wight gan drawe him to his rest,
As slepe hem bade, they toke it for the best.
  Hir dremes shul not now be told for me;
Ful were hir hedes of fumositee,
That causeth dreme, of which ther is no charge. 10673
They slepen til that it was prime large,
The moste part, but it were Canace;
She was ful mesurable, as women be.
For of hire father had she take hire leve
To gon to rest, sone after it was eve;
Hire liste not appalled for to be,
Nor on the morwe unfestliche for to see;
And slept hire firste slepe, and than awoke. 10681
For swiche a joye she in hire herte toke
Both of hire queinte ring, and of hire mirrour,
That twenty time she chaunged hire colour;
And in hire slepe right for the impression
Of hire mirrour she had a vision.
Wherfore, or that the sonne gan up glide,
She clepeth upon hire maistresse hire beside,
And saide, that hire luste for to arise.
  Thise olde women, that ben gladly wise, 10699

As is hire maistresse, answerd hire anon, 10691
And said; Madame, whider wol ye gon
Thus erly? for the folk ben all in rest.
  I wol, quod she, arisen (for me lest
No longer for to slepe) and walken aboute.
Hire maistresse clepeth women a gret route,
And up they risen, wel a ten or twelve;
Up riseth freshe Canace hireselve,
As rody and bright, as the yonge sonne, 10699
That in the ram is four degrees yronne;
No higher was he, whan she redy was;
And forth she walketh esily a pas,
Arrayed after the lusty seson sote
Lightely for to playe, and walken on fote,
Nought but with five or sixe of hire meinie;
And in a trenche forth in the park goth she.
  The vapour, which that fro the erthe glode, 10707
Maketh the sonne to seme rody and brode:
But natheles, it was so faire a sight,
That it made all hir hertes for to light,
What for the seson, and the morwening,
And for the foules that she herde sing.
For right anon she wiste what they ment
Right by hir song, and knew al hir entent.
  The knotte, why that every tale is tolde,
If it be taried til the lust be colde 10716

Of hem, that han it herkened after yore, 10717
The savour passeth ever lenger the more,
For fulsumnesse of the prolixitee:
And by that same reson thinketh me
I shuld unto the knotte condescende,
And maken of hire walking sone an ende.
  Amidde a tree for-dry, as white as chalk,
As Canace was playing in hire walk,
Ther sat a faucon over hire hed ful hie, 10725
That with a pitous vois so gan to crie,
That all the wood resouned of hire cry,
And beten had hireself so pitously
With both hire winges, til the rede blood
Ran endelong the tree, ther as she stood.
And ever in on alway she cried and shright,
And with hire bek hireselven she so twight,
That ther n'is tigre, ne no cruel best, 10733
That dwelleth other in wood, or in forest,
That n'olde han wept, if that he wepen coude,
For sorwe of hire, she shright alway so loude.
  For ther was never yet no man on live,
If that he coude a faucon wel descrive,
That herde of swiche another of fayrenesse
As wel of plumage, as of gentilesse,
Of shape, of all that might yrekened be.
A faucon peregrine semed she 10742

Of fremde lond, and ever as she stood,
She swouned now and now for lack of blood,
Til wel neigh is she fallen fro the tree.
This faire kinges doughter Canace,
That on hire finger bare the queinte ring,
Thurgh which she understood wel every thing
That any foule may in his leden sain,
And coude answere him in his leden again,
Hath understonden what this faucon seyd,
And wel neigh for the routhe almost she deyd:
And to the tree she goth ful hastily,
And on this faucon loketh pitously,
And held hire lap abrode, for wel she wist
The faucon muste fallen from the twist
Whan that she swouned next, for faute of blood.
A longe while to waiten hire she stood,
Til at the last she spake in this manere
Unto the hauk, as ye shul after here.
What is the cause, if it be for to tell,
That ye ben in this furial peine of hell?
Quod Canace unto this hauk above;
Is this for sorwe of deth, or losse of love?
For as I trow, thise be the causes two,
That causen most a gentil herte wo.
Of other harme it nedeth not to speke,
For ye yourself upon yourself awreke,

Which preveth wel, that other ire or drede 10769
Mote ben enchesen of your cruel dede,
Sin that I se non other wight you chace.
For the love of God, as doth yourselven grace
Or what may be your helpe? for west ne est
Ne saw I never er now no brid ne best,
That ferde with himself so pitously.
Ye sle me with your sorwe veraily,
I have of you so gret compassioun. 10777
For Goddes love come fro the tree adoun;
And as I am a kinges doughter trewe,
If that I veraily the causes knewe
Of your disese, if it lay in my might,
I wold amend it, or that it were night,
As wisly help me the gret God of kind.
And herbes shal I right ynough yfind,
To helen with your hurtes hastily. 10785
  Tho shright this faucon yet more pitously
Than ever she did, and fell to ground anon,
And lith aswoune, as ded as lith a ston,
Til Canace hath in hire lappe hire take,
Unto that time she gan of swoune awake:
And after that she out of swoune abraide,
Right in hire haukes leden thus she sayde.
  That pitee renneth sone in gentil herte
(Feling his similitude in peines smerte) 10794

Is proved alle day, as men may see,
As wel by werke as by auctoritee,
For gentil herte kitheth gentillesse.
I see wel, that ye have on my distresse
Compassion, my faire Canace,
Of veray womanly benignitee.
That nature in your principles hath set.
But for non hope for to fare the bet,
But for to obey unto your herte free,
And for to maken other yware by me,
As by the whelpe chastised is the leon,
Right for that cause and that conclusion,
While that I have a leiser and a space,
Min harme I wol confessen er I pace.
And ever while that on hire sorwe told,
That other wept, as she to water wold,
Til that the faucon bad hire to be still,
And with a sike right thus she said hire till.
  Ther I was bred, (alas that ilke day!)
And fostred in a roche of marble gray
So tendrely, that nothing ailed me.
I ne wist not what was adversitee,
Til I coud flee ful high under the skie.
  Tho dwelled a tercelet me faste by,
That semed welle of alle gentillesse,
Al were he ful of treson and falsenesse.

It was so wrapped under humble chere, 10821
And under hew of trouth in swiche manere,
Under plesance, and under besy peine,
That no wight coud have wend he coude feine,
So depe in greyn he died his coloures.
Right as a serpent hideth him under floures,
Til he may see his time for to bite;
Right so this god of loves hypocrite
Doth so his ceremonies and obeisance,
And kepeth in semblaunt alle his observance, 10829
That souneth unto gentillesse of love.
As on a tombe is all the faire above,
And under is the corps, swiche as ye wote;
Swiche was this hypocrite both cold and hote,
And in this wise he served his entent,
That, save the fend, non wiste what he ment:
Til he so long had weped and complained, 10837
And many a yere his service to me fained,
Til that min herte, to pitous and to nice,
Al innocent of his crowned malice,
For-fered of his deth, as thoughte me,
Upon his othes and his seuretee,
Graunted him love, on this conditioun,
That evermo min honour and renoun
Were saved, bothe privee and apert;
This is to say, that, after his desert, 10846

I yave him all min herte and all my thought,
(God wote, and he, that other wayes nought)
And toke his herte in chaunge of min for ay.
But soth is said, gon sithen is many a day,
A trewe wight and a theef thinken not on.
  And whan he saw the thing so fer ygon,
That I had granted him fully my love,
In swiche a guise as I have said above,
And yeven him my trewe herte as free
As he swore that he yaf his herte to me,
Anon this tigre, ful of doublenesse,
Fell on his knees with so gret humblesse,
With so high reverence, as by his chere,
So like a gentil lover of manere,
So ravished, as it semed, for the joye,
That never Jason, ne Paris of Troye,
Jason ? certes, ne never other man,
Sin Lamech was, that alderfirst began
So loven two, as writen folk beforne,
Ne never sithen the first man was borne,
Ne coude man by twenty thousand part
Contrefete the sophimes of his art;
Ne were worthy to unbocle his galoche,
Ther doublenesse of faining shuld approche,
Ne coude so thanke a wight, as he did me.
His maner was an heven for to see

To any woman, were she never so wise ; 10873
So painted he and kempt, at point devise,
As wel his wordes, as his contenance.
And I so loved him for his obeisance,
And for the trouthe I demed in his herte,
That if so were that any thing him smerte,
Al were it it never so lite, and I it wist,
Me thought I felt deth at myn herte twist.
And shortly, so ferforth this thing is went, 10881
That my will was his willes instrument ;
This is to say, my will obeied his will
In alle thing, as fer as reson fill,
Keping the boundes of my worship ever :
Ne never had I thing so lefe, ne lever,
As him, God wot, ne never shal no mo.
This lasteth lenger than a yere or two,
That I supposed of him nought but good. 10889
But finally, thus at the last it stood,
That fortune wolde that he muste twin
Out of that place, which that I was in.
Wher me was wo, it is no question ;
I cannot make of it description.
For o thing dare I tellen boldely,
I know what is the peine of deth therby,
Swiche harme I felt, for he ne might byleve.
So on a day of me he toke his leve, 10898

So sorweful eke, that I wend veraily, 10899
That he had felt as mochel harme as I,
Whan that I herd him speke, and saw his hewe.
But natheles, I thought he was so trewe,
And eke that he repairen shuld again
Within a litel while, soth to sain,
And reson wold eke that he muste go
For his honour, as often happeth so,
That I made vertue of necessitee, 10907
And toke it wel, sin that it muste be.
As I best might, I hid fro him my sorwe,
And toke him by the hond, Seint John to borwe,
And said him thus ; lo, I am youres all,
Beth swiche as I have ben to you and shall.
 What he answerd, it nedeth not reherse ;
Who can say bet than he, who can do werse ?
Whan he hath al wel said, than hath he done. 10915
Therfore behoveth him a ful long spone,
That shal ete with a fend ; thus herd I say.
 So at the last he muste forth his way,
And forth he fleeth, til he come ther him lest.
Whan it came him to purpos for to rest,
I trow that he had thilke text in mind,
That alle thing repairing to his kind
Gladeth himself ; thus sain men as I gesse :
Men loven of propre kind newefangelnesse, 10924

As briddes don, that men in cages fede.
For though thou night and day take of hem hede,
And strew hir cage faire and soft as silke,
And give hem sugre, hony, bred, and milke,
Yet right anon as that his dore is up,
He with his feet wol spurnen doun his cup,
And to the wood he wol, and wormes ete;
So newefangel ben they of hir mete,
And loven noveltees of propre kind;
No gentillesse of blood ne may hem bind
  So ferd this tercelet, alas the day!
Though he were gentil borne, and fresh, and gay,
And goodly for to seen, and humble, and free,
He saw upon a time a kite flee,
And sodenly he loved this kite so,
That all his love is clene fro me ago:
And hath his trouthe falsed in this wise.
Thus hath the kite my love in hire service,
And I am lorn withouten remedy.
  And with that word this faucon gan to cry,
And swouneth eft in Canacees barme.
Gret was the sorwe for that haukes harme,
That Canace and all hire women made;
They n'isten how they might the faucon glade.
But Canace home bereth hire in hire lap,
And softely in plastres gan hire wrap,

Ther as she with hire bek had hurt hireselve. 10951
Now cannot Canace but herbes delve
Out of the ground, and maken salves newe
Of herbes precious and fine of hewe,
To helen with this hauk ; fro day to night
She doth hire besinesse, and all hire might.
And by hire beddes hed she made a mew,
And covered it with velouettes blew,
In signe of trouth, that is in woman sene ; 10959
And all without the mew is peinted grene,
In which were peinted all thise false foules,
As ben thise tidifes, tercelettes, and owles ;
And pies, on hem for to cry and chide,
Right for despit were peinted hem beside.
Thus lete I Canace hire hauk keping.
I wol no more as now speke of hire ring,
Til it come eft to purpos for to sain, 10967
How that this faucon gat hire love again
Repentant, as the story telleth us,
By mediation of Camballus
The kinges sone, of which that I you told.
But hennesforth I wol my processe hold
To speke of aventures, and of batailles,
That yet was never herd so gret mervailles.
First wol I tellen you of Cambuscan,
That in his time many a citee wan : 10976

And after wol I speke of Algarsif, 10977
How that he wan Theodora to his wif,
For whom ful oft in gret peril he was,
Ne had he ben holpen by the hors of bras.
And after wol I speke of Camballo,
That fought in listes with the brethren two
For Canace, er that he might hire winne,
And ther I left I wol again beginne. 10984

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THE FRANKELEINES PROLOGUE.

In faith, Squier, thou hast thee wel yquit
And gentilly, I preise wel thy wit,
Quod the Frankelein; considering thin youthe,
So felingly thou spekest, sire, I aloue the
As to my dome, ther is non that is here, 10989
Of eloquence that shal be thy pere,
If that thou live; God yeve thee goode chance,
And in vertue send thee continuance,
For of thy speking I have gret deintee.
I have a sone, and by the Trinitee
It were me lever than twenty pound worth lond,
Though it right now were fallen in my hond,
He were a man of swiche discretion,
As that ye ben: fie on possession, 10998

But if a man be vertuous withal.
I have my sone snibbed, and yet shal,
For he to vertue listeth not to entend,
But for to play at dis, and to dispend,
And lese all that he hath, is his usage;
And he had lever talken with a page,
Than to commune with any gentil wight,
Ther he might leren gentillesse aright.
Straw for your gentillesse, quod our hoste.
What? Frankelein, parde, sire, wel thou wost,
That eche of you mote tellen at the lest
A tale or two, or breken his behest.
That know I wel, sire, quod the Frankelein,
I pray you haveth me not in disdein,
Though I to this man speke a word or two.
Tell on thy tale, withouten wordes mo.
Gladly, sire hoste, quod he, I wol obey
Unto your will; now herkeneth what I sey;
I wol you not contrarien in no wise,
As fer as that my wittes may suffice.
I pray to God that it may plesen you,
Than wot I wel that it is good ynow.

Thise olde gentil Bretons in hir dayes
Of diverse aventures maden layes,
Rimeyed in hir firste Breton tonge:

Which layes with hir instruments they songe, 11024
Or elles redden hem for hir plesance,
And on of hem have I in remembrance,
Which I shal sayn with good wille as I can.
  But, sires, because I am a borel man,
At my beginning first I you beseche
Have me excused of my rude speche.
I lerned never rhetorike certain;
Thing that I speke, it mote be bare and plain. 11032
I slept never on the mount of Pernaso,
Ne lerned Marcus Tullius Cicero.
Colours ne know I non, withouten drede,
But swiche colours as growen in the mede,
Or elles swiche as men die with or peinte;
Colours of rhetorike ben to me queinte;
My spirit feleth not of swiche matere.
But if you lust my tale shul ye here. 11040

THE FRANKELEINES TALE.

  In Armorike, that called is Bretaigne,
Ther was a knight, that loved and did his peine
To serve a ladie in his beste wise;
And many a labour, many a gret emprise
He for his lady wrought, or she were wonne:
For she was on the fairest under sonne, 11046

And eke therto comen of so high kinrede,
That wel unnethes durst this knight for drede
Tell hire his wo, his peine, and his distresse.
But at the last, she for his worthinesse,
And namely for his meke obeysance,
Hath swiche a pitee caught of his penance,
That prively she fell of his accord
To take him for hire husbond and hire lord,
(Of swiche lordship as menh an over hir wives)
And, for to lede the more in blisse hir lives,
Of his free will he swore hire as a knight,
That never in all his lif he day ne night
Ne shulde take upon him no maistrie
Agains hire will, ne kithe hire jalousie,
But hire obey, and folwe hire will in al,
As any lover to his lady shal:
Save that the name of soverainetee
That wold he han for shame of his degree.
She thonked him, and with ful gret humblesse
She saide; sire, sin of your gentillesse
Ye profren me to have so large a reine,
Ne wolde God never betwix us tweine,
As in my gilt, were either werre or strif:
Sire, I wol be your humble trewe wif,
Have here my trouth, till that myn herte breste.
Thus ben they both in quiete and in reste.

For o thing, sires, saufly dare I seie,
That frendes everich other must obeie,
If they wol longe holden compagnie.
Love wol not be constreined by maistrie.
Whan maistrie cometh, the God of love anon
Beteth his winges, and farewel, he is gon.
Love is a thing, as any spirit free.
Women of kind desiren libertee,
And not to be constreined as a thral;
And so don men, if sothly I say shal.
Loke who that is most patient in love,
He is at his avantage all above.
Patience is an high vertue certain,
For it venquisheth, as thise clerkes sain,
Thinges that rigour never shulde atteine.
For every word men may not chide or pleine.
Lerneth to suffren, or, so mote I gon,
Ye shul it lerne whether ye wol or non.
For in this world certain no wight ther is,
That he ne doth or sayth somtime amis.
Ire, sikenesse, or constellation,
Win, wo, or changing of complexion,
Causeth ful oft to don amis or speken:
On every wrong a man may not be wreken.
After the time must be temperance
To every wight that can of governance

And therfore hath this worthy wise knight, 11099
(To liven in ese) suffrance hire behight;
And she to him ful wisly gan to swere,
That never shuld ther be defaute in here.
  Here may men seen an humble wise accord:
Thus hath she take hire servant and hire lord,
Servant in love, and lord in mariage.
Than was he both in lordship and servage?
Servage? nay, but in lordship al above, 11107
Sin he hath both his lady and his love:
His lady certes, and his wif also,
The which that law of love accordeth to.
And whan he was in this prosperitee,
Home with his wif he goth to his contree,
Not fer fro Penmark, ther his dwelling was,
Wher as he liveth in blisse and in solas.
  Who coude tell, but he had wedded be, 11115
The joye, the ese, and the prosperitee,
That is betwix an husbond and his wif?
A yere and more lasteth this blisful lif,
Til that this knight, of which I spake of thus,
That of Cairrud was cleped Arviragus,
Shope him to gon and dwelle a yere or twaine
In Englelond, that cleped was eke Bretaigne,
To seke in armes worship and honour:
(For all his lust he set in swiche labour) 11124

And dwelte ther two yere; the book saith thus. 11125
  Now wol I stint of this Arviragus,
And speke I wol of Dorigene his wif,
That loveth hire husbond as hire hertes lif.
For his absence wepeth she and siketh,
As don thise noble wives whan hem liketh;
She morneth, waketh, waileth, fasteth, pleineth;
Desir of his presence hire so distraineth,
That all this wide world she set at nought. 11133
Hire frendes, which that knew hire hevy thought,
Comforten hire in all that ever they may;
They prechen hire, they telle hire night and day,
That causeles she sleth hireself, alas!
And every comfort possible in this cas
They don to hire, with all hir besinesse,
Al for to make hire leve hire hevinesse.
  By processe, as ye knowen everich on, 11141
Men mowe so longe graven in a ston,
Til som figure therin emprented be:
So long han they comforted hire, til she
Received hath, by hope and by reson,
The emprenting of hir consolation,
Thurgh which hire grete sorwe gan assuage;
She may not alway duren in swiche rage.
And eke Arviragus, in all this care,
Hath sent his lettres home of his welfare, 11150

And that he wol come hastily again, 11151
Or elles had this sorwe hire herte slain.
  Hire frendes saw hire sorwe gan to slake,
And preiden hire on knees for Goddes sake
To come and romen in hir compagnie,
Away to driven hire derke fantasie:
And finally she granted that request,
For wel she saw that it was for the best.
  Now stood hire castel faste by the see, 11159
And often with hire frendes walked she,
Hire to disporten on the bank an hie,
Wher as she many a ship and barge sie,
Sailing hir cours, wher as hem list to go.
But than was that a parcel of hire wo,
For to hireself ful oft, alas! said she,
Is ther no ship, of so many as I see,
Wol bringen home my lord? than were my herte 11167
Al warished of his bitter peines smerte.
  Another time wold she sit and thinke,
And cast her eyen dounward fro the brinke;
But whan she saw the grisly rockes blake,
For veray fere so wold hire herte quake,
That on hire feet she might hire not sustene.
Than wold she sit adoun upon the grene,
And pitously into the see behold,
And say right thus, with careful sikes cold, 11176

Eterne God, that thurgh thy purveance 11177
Ledest this world by certain governance,
In idel, as men sain, ye nothing make.
But, lord, thise grisly fendly rockes blake,
That semen rather a foule confusion
Of werk, than any faire creation
Of swiche a parfit wise God and stable,
Why han ye wrought this werk unresonable?
For by this werk, north, south, ne west, ne est, 11185
Ther n'is yfostred man, ne brid, ne best:
It doth no good to my wit, but anoyeth.
See ye not, lord, how mankind it destroyeth?
An hundred thousand bodies of mankind
Han rockes slain, al be they not in mind;
Which mankind is so faire part of thy werk,
Thou madest it like to thyn owen merk.
Than, semeth it, ye had a gret chertee 11193
Toward mankind; but how than may it be,
That ye swiche menes make it to destroyen?
Which menes don no good, but ever anoyen.
I wote wel, clerkes wol sain as hem lest
By arguments, that all is for the best,
Though I ne can the causes nought yknow;
But thilke God that made the wind to blow,
As kepe my lord, this is my conclusion:
To clerkes lete I all disputison: 11202

But wolde God, that all thise rockes blake
Were sonken into helle for his sake.
Thise rockes slee min herte for the fere.
Thus wold she say with many a pitous tere.
Hire frendes saw that it was no disport
To romen by the see, but discomfort,
And shape hem for to plaien somwher elles.
They leden hire by rivers and by welles,
And eke in other places delitable;
They dancen and they play at ches and tables.
So on a day, right in the morwe tide,
Unto a gardin that was ther beside,
In which that they had made hir ordinance
Of vitaille, and of other purveance,
They gon and plaie hem all the longe day:
And this was on the sixte morwe of May,
Which May had peinted with his softe shoures
This gardin ful of leves and of floures:
And craft of mannes hond so curiously
Arrayed had this gardin trewely,
That never was ther gardin of swiche pris,
But if it were the veray paradis.
The odour of floures, and the freshe sight,
Wold han ymaked any herte light
That ever was born, but if to gret sikenesse,
Or to gret sorwe held it in distresse,

So ful it was of beautee and plesance.
And after dinner gonnen they to dance
And sing also, sauf Dorigene alone,
Which made alway hire complaint and hire mone,
For she ne saw him on the dance go,
That was hire husbond, and hire love also:
But natheles she must a time abide,
And with good hope let hire sorwe slide.
Upon this dance, amonges other men,
Danced a squier before Dorigen,
That fresher was and jolier of array,
As to my dome, than is the month of May.
He singeth, danceth, passing any man,
That is or was sin that the world began;
Therwith he was, if men shuld him discrive,
On of the beste faring men on live,
Yong, strong, and vertuous, and riche, and wise,
And wel beloved, and holden in gret prise.
And shortly, if the soth I tellen shal,
Unweting of this Dorigene at al,
This lusty squier, servant to Venus,
Which that ycleped was Aurelius,
Had loved hire best of any creature
Two yere and more, as was his aventure:
But never dorst he tell hire his grevance,
Withouten cup he dranke all his penance.

He was dispeired, nothing dorst he say,
Sauf in his songes somwhat wold he wray
His wo, as in a general complaining;
He said, he loved, and was beloved nothing.
Of swiche matere made he many layes,
Songes, complaintes, roundels, virelays;
How that he dorste not his sorwe telle,
But languisheth, as doth a furie in helle;
And die he must, he said, as did Ecco
For Narcissus, that dorst not tell hire wo.
In other maner than ye here me say,
Ne dorst he not to hire his wo bewray,
Sauf that paraventure somtime at dances,
Ther yonge folk kepen hir observances,
It may wel be he loked on hire face
In swiche a wise, as man that axeth grace,
But nothing wiste she of his entent.
Natheles it happed, or they thennes went,
Because that he was hire neighebour,
And was a man of worship and honour,
And had yknowen him of time yore,
They fell in speche, and forth ay more and more
Unto his purpos drow Aurelius;
And whan he saw his time, he saide thus.
Madame, quod he, by God that this world made,
So that I wist it might your herte glade,

I wold that day, that your Arviragus 11281
Went over see, that I Aurelius
Had went ther I shuld never come again;
For wel I wot my service is in vain,
My guerdon n'is but bresting of min herte.
Madame, rueth upon my peines smerte,
For with a word ye may me sleen or save.
Here at your feet God wold that I were grave.
I ne have as now no leiser more to sey: 11289
Have mercy, swete, or ye wol do me dey.
  She gan to loke upon Aurelius;
Is this your will (quod she) and say ye thus?
Never erst (quod she) ne wist I what ye ment:
But now, Aurelie, I know your entent.
By thilke God that yaf me soule and lif,
Ne shal I never ben an untrewe wif
In word ne work, as fer as I have wit, 11297
I wol ben his to whom that I am knit:
Take this for final answer as of me.
But after that in play thus saide she.
  Aurelie, (quod she) by high God above
Yet wol I granten you to ben your love,
(Sin I you see so pitously complaine)
Loke, what day that endelong Bretaigne
Ye remue all the rockes, ston by ston,
That they ne letten ship ne bote to gon, 11306

I say, whan ye han made the cost so clene
Of rockes, that ther n'is no ston ysene,
Than wol I love you best of any man,
Have here my trouth, in all that ever I can;
For wel I wote that it shal never betide.
Let swiche folie out of your herte glide.
What deintee shuld a man have in his lif
For to go love another mannes wif,
That hath hire body whan that ever him liketh?
  Aurelius ful often sore siketh;
Is ther non other grace in you? quod he.
  No, by that lord, quod she, that maked me.
Wo was Aurelie whan that he this herd,
And with a sorweful herte he thus answerd.
  Madame, quod he, this were an impossible.
That moste I die of soden deth horrible.
And with that word he turned him anon.
  Tho come hire other frendes many on,
And in the alleyes romed up and doun,
And nothing wist of this conclusioun,
But sodenly begonnen revel newe,
Til that the brighte sonne had lost his hewe,
For the orizont had reft the sonne his light;
(This is as much to sayn as it was night)
And home they gon in mirthe and in solas;
Sauf only wrecche Aurelius, alas!

He to his hous is gon with sorweful herte. 11333
He saith, he may not from his deth asterte.
Him semeth, that he felt his herte cold.
Up to the heven his hondes gan he hold,
And on his knees bare he set him doun,
And in his raving said his orisoun.
For veray wo out of his wit he braide,
He n'iste what he spake, but thus he saide;
With pitous herte his plaint hath he begonne 11341
Unto the goddes, and first unto the sonne.
He said; Apollo, God and governour
Of every plante, herbe, tree, and flour,
That yevest after thy declination
To eche of hem his time and his seson,
As that thin herbergh changeth low and hie;
Lord Phebus, cast thy merciable eie
On wrecche Aurelie, which that am but lorne. 11349
Lo, lord, my lady hath my deth ysworne
Withouten gilt, but thy benignitee
Upon my dedly herte have som pitee.
For wel I wot, lord Phebus, if you lest,
Ye may me helpen, sauf my lady, best.
Now voucheth sauf, that I may you devise
How that I may be holpe and in what wise.
Your blisful suster, Lucina the shene,
That of the see is chief goddesse and quene, 11358

Though Neptunus have deitee in the see, 11359
Yet emperice aboven him is she:
Ye knowe wel, lord, that right as hire desire
Is to be quiked and lighted of your fire,
For which she folweth you ful besily,
Right so the see desireth naturelly
To folwen hire, as she that is goddesse
Both in the see and rivers more and lesse.
Wherfore, lord Phebus, this is my request, 11367
Do this miracle, or do min herte brest;
That now next at this opposition,
Which in the signe shal be of the Leon,
As preyeth hire so gret a flood to bring,
That five fadome at the lest it overspring
The highest rock in Armorike Bretaigne,
And let this flood enduren yeres twaine:
Than certes to my lady may I say, 11375
Holdeth your hest, the rockes ben away.
Lord Phebus, this miracle doth for me,
Prey hire she go no faster cours than ye;
I say this, preyeth your suster that she go
No faster cours than ye thise yeres two:
Than shal she ben even at ful alway,
And spring-flood lasten bothe night and day.
And but she vouchesauf in swiche manere
To graunten me my soveraine lady dere, 11384

Prey hire to sinken every rock adoun 11385
Into hire owen derke regioun
Under the ground, ther Pluto dwelleth in,
Or nevermo shal I my lady win.
Thy temple in Delphos wol I barefoot seke.
Lord Phebus, see the teres on my cheke,
And on my peine have som compassioun.
And with that word, in sorwe he fell adoun,
And longe time he lay forth in a trance. 11393
His brother, which that knew of his penance,
Up caught him, and to bed he hath him brought.
Dispeired in this turment and this thought
Let I this woful creature lie,
Chese he for me whether he wol live or die.
Arviragus with hele and gret honour
(As he that was of chevalrie the flour)
Is comen home, and other worthy men: 11401
O, blisful art thou now, thou Dorigen,
That hast thy lusty husbond in thin armes,
The freshe knight, the worthy man of armes,
That loveth thee, as his owen hertes lif:
Nothing list him to be imaginatif,
If any wight had spoke, while he was oute,
To hire of love; he had of that no doute;
He not entendeth to no swiche matere,
But danceth, justeth, and maketh mery chere. 11410

And thus in joye and blisse I let hem dwell, 11411
And of the sike Aurelius wol I tell.
  In langour and in turment furious
Two yere and more lay wrecche Aurelius,
Er any foot on erthe he mighte gon;
Ne comfort in this time ne had he non,
Sauf of his brother, which that was a clerk.
He knew of all this wo and all this werk;
For to non other creature certain 11419
Of this matere he dorste no word sain;
Under his brest he bare it more secree,
Than ever did Pamphilus for Galathee.
His brest was hole withouten for to seen,
But in his herte ay was the arwe kene,
And wel ye knowe that of a sursanure
In surgerie is perilous the cure,
But men might touch the arwe or come therby. 11427
  His brother wepeth and waileth prively,
Til at the last him fell in remembrance,
That while he was at Orleaunce in France,
As yonge clerkes, that ben likerous
To reden artes that ben curious,
Seken in every halke and every herne
Particuler sciences for to lerne,
He him remembred, that upon a day
At Orleaunce in studie a book he say 11436

Of Magike naturel, which his felaw, 11437
That was that time a bacheler of law,
Al were he ther to lerne another craft,
Had prively upon his desk ylaft;
Which book spake moche of operations
Touching the eight and twenty mansions
That longen to the Mone and swiche folie
As in our dayes n'is not worth a flie:
For holy cherches feith, in our beleve, 11445
Ne suffreth non illusion us to greve.
And whan this book was in his remembrance,
Anon for joye his herte gan to dance,
And to himself he saied prively;
My brother shal be warished hastily:
For I am siker that ther be sciences,
By which men maken divers apparences,
Swiche as thise subtil tregetoures play. 11453
For oft at festes have I wel herd say,
That tregetoures, within an halle large,
Have made come in a water and a barge,
And in the halle rowen up and doun.
Somtime hath semed come a grim leoun,
And somtime floures spring as in a mede,
Somtime a vine, and grapes white and rede,
Somtime a castel al of lime and ston,
And whan hem liketh voideth it anon: 11462

Thus semeth it to every mannes sight. 11463
Now than conclude I thus, if that I might
At Orleaunce som olde felaw find,
That hath thise Mones mansions in mind,
Or other Magike naturel above,
He shuld wel make my brother have his love.
For with an apparence a clerk may make
To mannes sight, that all the rockes blake
Of Bretaigne were yvoided everich on, 11471
And shippes by the brinke comen and gon,
And in swiche forme endure a day or two:
Than were my brother warished of his wo,
Than must she nedes holden hire behest,
Or elles he shal shame hire at the lest.
What shuld I make a lenger tale of this?
Unto his brothers bed he comen is,
And swiche comfort he yaf him, for to gon 11479
To Orleaunce, that he up stert anon,
And on his way forthward than is he fare,
In hope for to ben lissed of his care.
Whan they were come almost to that citee,
But if it were a two furlong or three,
A yonge clerk roming by himself they mette,
Which that in Latine thriftily hem grette.
And after that he sayd a wonder thing;
I know, quod he, the cause of your coming: 11488

And or they forther any foote went, 11489
He told hem all that was in hir entent.
This Breton clerk him axed of felawes,
The which he had yknowen in olde dawes,
And he answered him that they dede were,
For which he wept ful often many a tere.
Doun of his hors Aurelius light anon,
And forth with this magicien is gon
Home to his hous, and made hem wel at ese: 11497
Hem lacked no vitaille that might hem plese.
So wel arraied hous as ther was on,
Aurelius in his lif saw never non.
He shewed him, or they went to soupere,
Forestes, parkes ful of wilde dere.
Ther saw he hartes with hir hornes hie,
The gretest that were ever seen with eie.
He saw of hem an hundred slain with houndes, 11505
And som with arwes blede of bitter woundes.
He saw, whan voided were the wilde dere,
Thise fauconers upon a faire rivere,
That with hir haukes han the heron slain.
Tho saw he knightes justen in a plain.
And after this he did him swiche plesance,
That he him shewed his lady on a dance,
On which himselven danced, as him thought. 11513
And whan this maister, that this magike wrought,

Saw it was time, he clapped his hondes two,
And farewel, al the revel is ago.
And yet remued they never out of the hous,
While they saw all thise sightes merveillous;
But in his studie, ther his bookes be,
They saten still, and no wight but they three.
To him this maister called his squier,
And sayd him thus, may we go to souper?
Almost an houre it is, I undertake,
Sin I you bade our souper for to make,
Whan that thise worthy men wenten with me
Into my studie, ther my bookes be.
Sire, quod this squier, whan it liketh you,
It is al redy, though ye wol right now.
Go we than soupe, quod he, as for the best,
Thise amorous folk somtime moste han rest.
At after souper fell they in tretee
What summe shuld this maisters guerdon be,
To remue all the rockes of Bretaigne,
And eke from Gerounde to the mouth of Saine.
He made it strange, and swore, so God him save,
Lesse than a thousand pound he wold not have,
Ne gladly for that summe he wold not gon.
Aurelius with blisful herte anon
Answered thus; fie on a thousand pound:
This wide world, which that men sayn is round,

I wold it yeve, if I were lord of it. 11541
This bargaine is ful drive, for we ben knit;
Ye shul be paied trewely by my trouth.
But loketh, for non negligence or slouth,
Ye tarie us here no lenger than to morwe.
Nay, quod this clerk, have here my faith to borwe.
  To bed is gon Aurelius whan him lest,
And wel nigh all that night he had his rest,
What for his labour, and his hope of blisse, 11549
His woful herte of penance had a lisse.
  Upon the morwe whan that it was day,
To Bretaigne token they the righte way,
Aurelie, and this magicien him beside,
And ben descended ther they wold abide:
And this was, as the bookes me remember,
The colde frosty seson of December.
  Phebus waxe old, and hewed like laton, 11557
That in his hote declination
Shone as the burned gold, with stremes bright;
But now in Capricorne adoun he light,
Wher as he shone ful pale, I dare wel sain.
The bitter froste with the sleet and rain
Destroyed hath the grene in every yerd.
Janus sit by the fire with double berd,
And drinketh of his bugle horn the wine:
Beforn him stant braune of the tusked swine, 11566

And *nowel* crieth every lusty man
  Aurelius in all that ever he can,
Doth to his maister chere and reverence,
And praieth him to don his diligence
To bringen him out of his peines smerte,
Or with a swerd that he wold slit his herte.
  This sotil clerk swiche routh hath on this man,
That night and day he spedeth him, that he can,
To wait a time of his conclusion;
That is to sayn, to make illusion,
By swiche an apparence or joglerie,
(I can no termes of Astrologie)
That she and every wight shuld wene and say,
That of Bretaigne the rockes were away,
Or elles they were sonken under ground.
So at the last he hath his time yfound
To make his japes and his wretchednesse
Of swiche a superstitious cursednesse.
His tables Toletanes forth he brought
Ful wel corrected, that ther lacked nought,
Nother his collect, ne his expans yeres,
Nother his rotes, ne his other geres,
As ben his centres, and his argumentes,
And his proportionel convenientes
For his equations in every thing.
And by his eighte speres in his werking,

He knew ful wel how fer Alnath was shove 11593
Fro the hed of thilke fix Aries above,
That in the ninthe spere considered is.
Ful sotilly he calculed all this.
Whan he had found his firste mansion,
He knew the remenant by proportion;
And knew the rising of his Mone wel.
And in whos face, and terme, and every del;
And knew ful wel the mones mansion 11601
Accordant to his operation;
And knew also his other observances,
For swiche illusions and swiche meschances,
As hethen folk used in thilke daies.
For which no lenger maketh he delaies,
But thurgh his magike, for a day or tway,
It semed all the rockes were away.
  Aurelius, which that despeired is, 11609
Whether he shal han his love, or fare amis,
Awaiteth night and day on this miracle:
And whan he knew that ther was non obstacle,
That voided were thise rockes everich on,
Doun to his maisters feet he fell anon,
And sayd; I woful wretch Aurelius,
Thanke you, my lord, and lady min Venus,
That me han holpen fro my cares cold.
And to the temple his way forth hath he hold, 11618

Theras he knew he shuld his lady see. 11619
And whan he saw his time, anon right he
With dredful herte and with ful humble chere
Salued hath his soveraine lady dere.
  My rightful lady, quod this woful man,
Whom I most drede, and love, as I best can,
And lothest were of all this world displese,
N'ere it that I for you have swiche disese,
That I must die here at your foot anon, 11627
Nought wold I tell how me is wo begon.
But certes other must I die or plaine;
Ye sle me gilteles for veray peine.
But of my deth though that ye han no routh,
Aviseth you, or that ye breke your trouth:
Repenteth you for thilke God above,
Or ye me sle, because that I you love.
For, madame, wel ye wote what ye have hight; 11635
Not that I chalenge any thing of right
Of you, my soveraine lady, but of grace;
But in a gardin yond, in swiche a place,
Ye wote right wel what ye behighten me,
And in myn hond your trouthe plighten ye,
To love me best; God wote ye saied so,
Although that I unworthy be therto;
Madame, I speke it for the honour of you,
More than to save my hertes lif right now: 11644

I have don so as ye commanded me, 11645
And if ye vouchesauf, ye may go see.
Doth as you list, have your behest in mind,
For quick or ded, right ther ye shul me find:
In you lith all to do me live or dey,
But wel I wote the rockes ben awey.
  He taketh his leve, and she astonied stood;
In all hire face n'as o drope of blood:
She wened never han come in swiche a trappe. 11653
  Alas! quod she, that ever this shuld happe!
For wend I never by possibilitee,
That swiche a monstre or mervaille might be:
It is again the processe of nature.
And home she goth a sorweful creature,
For veray fere unnethes may she go.
She wepeth, waileth all a day or two,
And swouneth, that it routhe was to see: 11661
But why it was, to no wight tolde she,
For out of toun was gon Arviragus.
But to hireself she spake, and saied thus,
With face pale, and with ful sory chere,
In hire complaint, as ye shul after here.
  Alas! quod she, on thee, fortune, I plain,
That unware hast me wrapped in thy chain:
Fro which to escapen, wote I no soccour,
Sauf only deth, or elles dishonour: 11670

On of thise two behoveth me to chese. 11671
But natheles, yet had I lever lese
My lif, than of my body have a shame,
Or know myselven false, or lese my name;
And with my deth I may be quit ywis.
Hath ther not many a noble wif or this,
And many a maid yslaine hireself, alas!
Rather than with hire body don trespas?
Yes certes; lo, thise stories bere witnesse. 11679
 Whan thirty tyrants ful of cursednesse
Had slain Phidon in Athens at the fest,
They commanded his doughtren for to arrest,
And bringen hem beforne hem in despit
Al naked, to fulfill hir foule delit;
And in hir fadres blood they made hem dance
Upon the pavement, God yeve hem meschance.
For which thise woful maidens ful of drede, 11687
Rather than they wold lese hir maidenhede,
They prively ben stert into a welle,
And dreint hemselven, as the bookes telle.
 They of Messene let enquere and seke
Of Lacedomie fifty maidens eke,
On which they wolden don hir lecherie:
But ther was non of all that compagnie
That she n'as slaine, and with a glad entent
Chees rather for to dien, than assent 11696

To ben oppressed of hire maidenhede. 11697
Why shuld I than to dien ben in drede?
  Lo eke the tyrant Aristoclides,
That loved a maid hight Stimphalides,
Whan that hire father slaine was on a night,
Unto Dianes temple goth she right,
And hente the image in hire handes two,
Fro which image wold she never go,
No wight hire handes might of it arrace, 11705
Til she was slaine right in the selve place.
  Now sin that maidens hadden swiche despit
To be defouled with mannes foule delit,
Wel ought a wif rather hireselven sle,
Than be defouled, as it thinketh me.
  What shal I sayn of Hasdrubales wif,
That at Cartage beraft hireself hire lif?
For whan she saw that Romains wan the toun, 11713
She toke hire children all, and skipt adoun
Into the fire, and chees rather to die,
Than any Romain did hire vilanie.
  Hath not Lucrece yslaine hireself, alas!
At Rome, whan that she oppressed was
Of Tarquine? for hire thought it was a shame
To liven, whan she hadde lost hire name.
  The seven maidens of Milesie also
Han slaine hemself for veray drede and wo, 11722

Rather than folk of Gaule hem shuld oppresse. 11723
Mo than a thousand stories, as I gesse.
Coude I now tell as touching this matere.
Whan Abradate was slain, his wif so dere
Hireselven slow, and let hire blood to glide
In Abradates woundes, depe and wide,
And sayd, my body at the leste way
Ther shal no wight defoulen, if I may.
What shuld I mo ensamples hereof sain? 11731
Sin that so many han hemselven slain
Wel rather than they wold defouled be,
I wol conclude that it is bet for me
To sle myself than be defouled thus.
I wol be trewe unto Arviragus,
Or elles sle myself in some manere,
As did Demotiones doughter dere,
Because she wolde not defouled be. 11739
O Sedasus, it is ful gret pitee
To reden how thy doughtren died, alas!
That slowe hemselven for swiche maner cas.
As gret a pitee was it or wel more,
The Theban maiden, that for Nichanore
Hireselven slow, right for swiche manere wo.
Another Theban mayden did right so,
For on of Macedoine, had hire oppressed,
She with hire deth hire maidenhed redressed. 11748

What shal I sain of Nicerates wif, 11749
That for swiche cas beraft hireself hire lif?
How trewe was eke to Alcibiades
His love, that for to dien rather chees,
Than for to suffre his body unburied be?
Lo, which a wif was Alceste eke? (quod she)
What sayth Homere of good Penelope?
All Grece knoweth of hire chastitee.
Parde of Laodomia is written thus, 11757
That whan at Troye was slain Prothesilaus,
No lenger wolde she live after his day.
The same of noble Portia tell I may;
Withouten Brutus coude she not live,
To whom she had all hol hire herte yeve.
The parfit wifhood of Artemisie
Honoured is thurghout all Barbarie.
O Teuta quene, thy wifly chastitee 11765
To alle wives may a mirrour be.
Thus plained Dorigene a day or twey,
Purposing ever that she wolde dey;
But natheles upon the thridde night
Home came Arviragus, the worthy knight,
And axed hire why that she weep so sore:
And she gan wepen ever lenger the more.
Alas, quod she, that ever I was yborne! 11773
Thus have I said, (quod she) thus have I sworne.

And told him all, as ye have herd before:
It nedeth not reherse it you no more.
This husbond with glad chere in frendly wise
Answerd and sayd, as I shal you devise.
Is ther ought elles, Dorigene, but this?
Nay, nay, quod she, God helpe me so, as wis
This is to much, and it were Goddes will.
Ye, wif, quod he, let slepen that is still,
It may be wel paraventure yet to-day.
Ye shal your trouthe holden by my fay.
For God so wisly have mercy on me,
I had wel lever stiked for to be,
For veray love which that I to you have,
But if ye shuld your trouthe kepe and save.
Trouth is the hiest thing that man may kepe.
But with that word he brast anon to wepe,
And sayd; I you forbede on peine of deth,
That never while you lasteth lif or breth,
To no wight tell ye this misaventure.
As I may best I wol my wo endure.
Ne make no contenance of hevinesse,
That folk of you may demen harme or gesse.
And forth he cleped a squier and a maid.
Goth forth anon with Dorigene, he said,
And bringeth hire to swiche a place anon.
They take hir leve, and on hir way they gon:

But they ne wisten why she thider went, 11801
She n'olde no wight tellen hire entent.
  This squier, which that highte Aurelius,
On Dorigene that was so amorous,
Of aventure happed hire to mete
Amid the toun, right in the quikkest strete,
As she was boun to go the way forthright
Toward the gardin, ther as she had hight.
And he was to the gardinward also; 11809
For well he spied whan she wolde go
Out of hire hous, to any maner place:
But thus they met of aventure or grace,
And he salueth hire with glad entent,
And axeth of hire whiderward she went.
  And she answered, half as she were mad,
Unto the gardin, as myn husbond bad,
My trouthe for to hold, alas! alas! 11817
  Aurelius gan wondren on this cas,
And in his herte had gret compassion
Of hire, and of hire lamentation,
And of Arviragus the worthy knight,
That bad hire holden all that she had hight,
So loth him was his wif shuld breke hire trouthe.
And in his herte he caught of it gret routhe,
Considering the best on every side,
That fro his lust yet were him lever abide, 11826

Than do so high a cherlish wretchednesse 11827
Ageins fraunchise, and alle gentillesse;
For which in fewe wordes sayd he thus.
Madame, say to your lord Arviragus,
That sin I see the grete gentillesse
Of him, and eke I see wel your distresse,
That him were lever have shame (and that were routhe)
Than ye to me shuld breken thus your trouthe,
I hadde wel lever ever to suffren wo, 11835
Than to depart the love betwix you two.
I you relese, madame, into your hond
Quit every seurement and every bond,
That ye han made to me, as herebeforne,
Sin thilke time that ye were yborne.
Have here my trouthe, I shal you never repreve
Of no behest, and here I take my leve,
As of the trewest and the beste wif, 11843
That ever yet I knew in all my lif.
But every wif beware of hire behest;
On Dorigene remembreth at the lest.
Thus can a squier don a gentil dede,
As wel as can a knight, withouten drede.
She thanketh him upon hire knees bare,
And home unto hire husbond is she fare,
And told him all, as ye han herd me sayd:
And, trusteth me, he was so wel apayd,
That it were impossible me to write. 11853

What shuld I lenger of this cas endite?
Arviragus and Dorigene his wif
In soveraine blisse leden forth hir lif,
Never eft ne was ther anger hem betwene;
He cherished hire as though she were a quene,
And she was to him trewe for evermore:
Of thise two folk ye get of me no more.
Aurelius, that his cost hath all forlorne,
Curseth the time, that ever he was borne.
Alas! quod he, alas that I behight
Of pured gold a thousand pound of wight
Unto this philosophre! how shal I do?
I see no more, but that I am fordo.
Min heritage mote I nedes sell,
And ben a begger, here I n'ill not dwell,
And shamen all my kinrede in this place,
But I of him may geten better grace.
But natheles I wol of him assay
At certain daies yere by yere to pay,
And thanke him of grete curtesie.
My trouthe wol I kepe, I wol not lie.
With herte sore he goth unto his cofre,
And broughte gold unto this philosophre,
The value of five hundred pound I gesse,
And him besecheth of his gentillesse
To graunt him daies of the remenaunt,
And sayde; maister, I dare wel make avaunt,

I failled never of my trouthe as yet. 11881
For sikerly my dette shal be quit
Towardes you, how so that ever I fare
To gon a begging in my kirtle bare:
But wold ye vouchen sauf upon seurtee
Two yere or three for to respiten me,
Than were I wel, for elles mote I sell
Min heritage, ther is no more to tell.
This Philosophre sobrely answerd, 11889
And saied thus, whan he thise wordes herd;
Have I not holden covenant to thee?
Yes certes, wel and trewely, quod he.
Hast thou not had thy lady as thee liketh?
No, no, quod he, and sorwefully he siketh.
What was the cause? tell me if thou can
Aurelius his tale anon began,
And told him all as ye han herd before, 11897
It nedeth not reherse it any more.
He sayd, Arviragus of gentillesse
Had lever die in sorwe and in distresse,
Than that his wif were of hire trouthe fals.
The sorwe of Dorigene he told him als,
How loth hire was to ben a wicked wif,
And that she lever had lost that day hire lif;
And that her trouth she swore thurgh innocence;
She never erst hadde herd speke of apparence 11906

That made me han of hire so gret pitee, 11907
And right as freely as he sent hire to me,
As freely sent I hire to him again:
This is all and som, ther n'is no more to sain.
The Philosophre answerd; leve brother,
Everich of you did gentilly to other:
Thou art a squier, and he is a knight,
But God forbede for his blisful might,
But if a clerk coud don a gentil dede 11915
As wel as any of you, it is no drede.
Sire, I relese thee thy thousand pound,
As thou right now were crope out of the ground,
Ne never er now ne haddest knowen me.
For, sire, I wol not take a peny of thee
For all my craft, ne nought for my travaille:
Thou hast ypaied wel for my vitaille.
It is ynough, and farewel, have good day. 11923
And toke his hors, and forth he goth his way
Lordings, this question wold I axen now,
Which was the moste free, as thinketh you?
Now telleth me, or that ye further wende.
I can no more, my tale is at an ende. 11928

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